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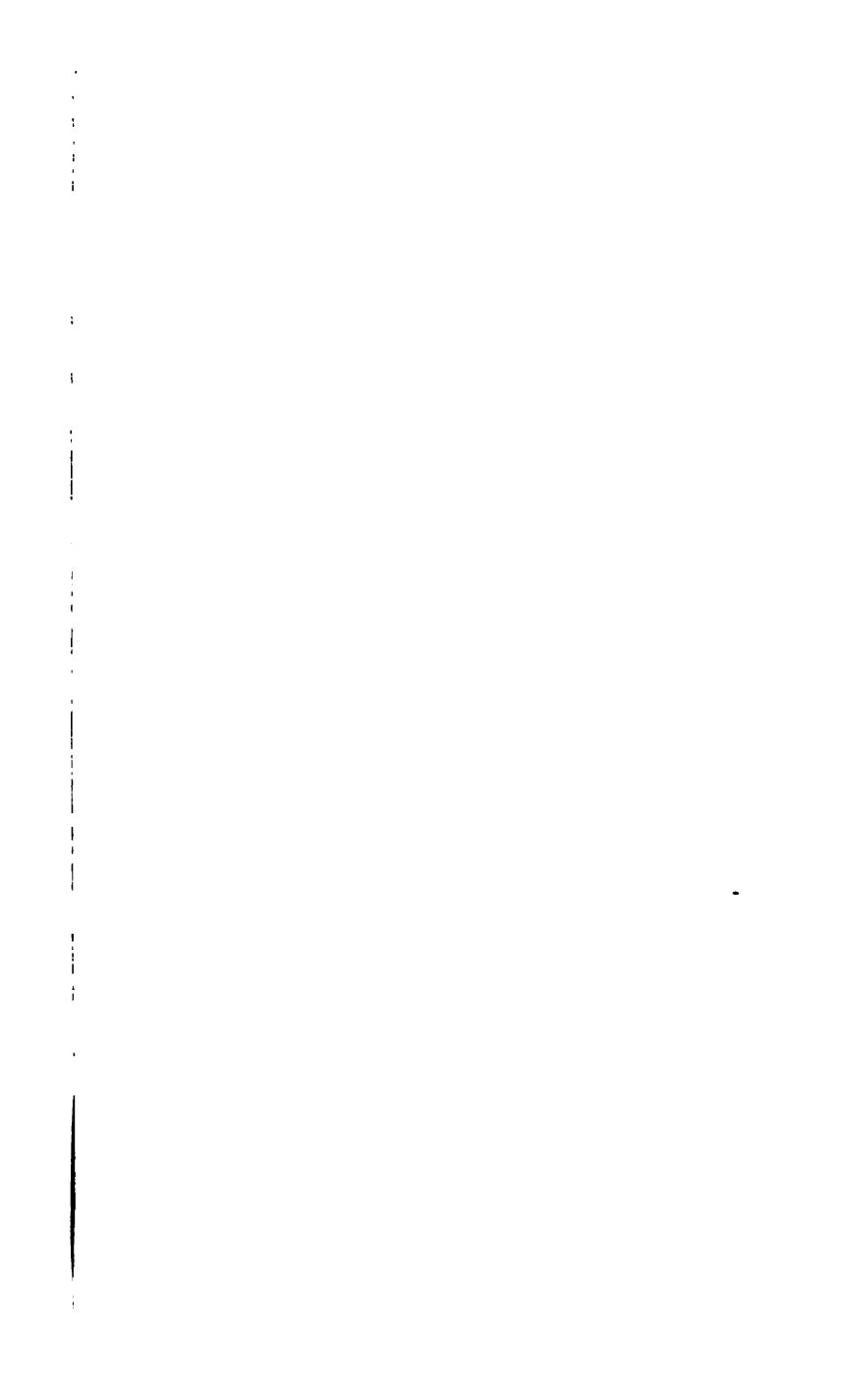
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# TRACTS.

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED  
BY THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY  
FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE  
AND THE PRACTICE OF VIRTUE.

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*SECOND SERIES.*  
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VOL. VIII.

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CONTAINING

Mr. Lindsey's Farewel Address to the Parishioners  
of Catterick: Mr. Lindsey's Conversations on  
Christian Idolatry: Mr. Lindsey's Conversations on the Divine Government;  
shewing that every Thing is from  
God, and for good to all.

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London :

PRINTED BY C. STOWER, PATER NOSTER ROW.

1805.

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**FAREWEL ADDRESS**

**TO THE**

***PARISHIONERS OF CATTERICK.***

~~~~~  
**BY THE**

**REV. THEOPHILUS LINDSEY, M. A.**

~~~~~  
[First published in 1774.]

◆  
**LONDON :**

**PRINTED BY C. STOWER, 32, PATER NOSTER-ROW.**

—  
**1805.**

### *ADVERTISEMENT.*

This small Tract was drawn up solely for the use of a Country-Parish, and never intended to go beyond it. But the kind reception it met with there, from an affectionate and grateful people, and their entering so entirely into the cause and subject of it ; added to the suggestion of serious friends that it might be of some general use, has been an inducement to make it more public.

# FAREWEL ADDRESS.

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MY BRETHREN AND FELLOW CHRISTIANS,

IT will be natural for you to inquire, how it should come to pass, that a minister, with whom you have lived on the best terms, should leave you and a situation, many ways agreeable and beneficial to him, not only without any prospect of preferment, the usual motive for such changes, but the contrary.

As far as I can judge of myself, since I came among you, no preferment would have tempted me to a change; and I have assuredly never sought any other: but here I thought quietly to have ended my days.

It hath pleased God in his providence to order it otherwise. And his commands are to be obeyed, and his will preferred, before every earthly consideration or advantage.

You are many of you no strangers to the cause of my short absences from you at different times, these two or three years past. You have heard that there was a design set on foot to move our governors, to lighten some burdens that are laid upon clergymen, when they enter upon a cure of souls, in requiring them to subscribe to the XXXIX Articles of our Church, and declare their approbation of every thing in the

Common-prayer Book as being agreable to the word of God.

The request humbly made to Parliament was, that we might be required to subscribe to nothing but the Bible, the word of God; and not to the articles, or any form of prayer or worship drawn up by fallible men. And I have no doubt but you of yourselves would think this sufficient, and that, as your ministers are to teach you nothing but the pure word of God, they ought not to be put upon subscribing to any thing else.

But you are farther to know, that some engaged in this Petition to Parliament, and myself among the rest, in hope that it would lead also to an amendment of many things in our Liturgy or Common-prayer Book.

You will carefully distinguish here, that our holy religion itself, the religion of Christ, can never be amended. That is always invariably the same; always most perfect and compleat, and is contained in the inspired writings of the New Testament.

But the religion which men have made out of it, whether contained in the Common-prayer Book, or any other book, this will be liable to errors, and imperfections, and often want amendment.

And thus at the reformation from popery, when our forefathers asserted the sufficiency of holy scripture unto salvation, and their right of interpreting it for themselves; they purged out of their liturgy or common-prayer book many idolatrous and superstitious practices, such as praying to saints, viz. dead men and women; praying to the mass-god, or the bread in the sacrament; praying in latin; the use of



oil and spittle in baptism ; extreme unction, or anointing dying persons with oil ; lighting up candles, on Candlemas-day ; marking the forehead with ashes, on Ash-Wednesday ; with many of the like idle fopperies and trumpery, which are still retained among the papists, who are in no small number in your own parish ; against whose seducing arts I beg you to be continually upon your guard.

Endeavours have been used, under several of our princes since, to render our Common-prayer Book more strictly agreeable to the holy scriptures, than it could be all at once at its first composing. And particularly about fourscore years ago, at the Revolution, with the countenance of those pious princes, King William and Queen Mary, many great and excellent men, Archbishop Tillotson, Bishops Patrick, Burnet, and others, begun the good work, and made great progress in it ; but through the violent opposition of some factious persons, it came to nothing. From that time to this, no attempts have been made, nor any thing done by public authority ; through fear, perhaps, of creating disturbances in the state. Although, whenever the experiment is made, I doubt not, but it will be found, that an improved liturgy, brought nearer to the standard of holy scripture, would be generally acceptable to the nation, and contribute to the public peace, as well as to the promotion of true religion.

In the mean time, the errors that call for amendment in the Common-prayer Book, give great pain to serious considerate men, zealous for the purity of God's worship. Lesser mistakes and faults in human things ought surely to be borne with ; for there is nothing

perfect here below. But where a man esteems any thing contrary to God's word, and sinful, though others may not so esteem it, he cannot, consistently with integrity, comply with it.

In this sinful light all those prayers appear to me, which are addressed to the Trinity, (as, O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity,) to Christ, to the Holy Ghost, or to any other person, but God himself. For our blessed Saviour always offered up prayer himself to God, his Father and our Father, his God and our God, John xx. 17. and he also enjoined us to pray to the Father only; Luke xi. 2. When ye pray, say, "Our Father, &c." Many of the prayers in the Liturgy are truly excellent, and quite agreeable to this rule and example of holy scripture. There are also many which are not so; particularly in the Litany; which are immediately directed to Christ, and not to God. I cannot approve, or offer up such prayers myself; or authorize them to be offered up by another for me. The case may be different with regard to you, who are only hearers, and do not lead the devotions of others; and who have no opportunity of attending a purer worship. If you should disapprove of any part of the service which you hear, you may pass it over, and so far not join in it; but your minister, by reading it, makes it more his own.

I cannot, therefore, continue in the use of such forms of worship which I believe to be sinful, without the guilt of continual insincerity before God, and endangering the loss of his favour for ever. For he requireth truth in the inward parts, Psalm. li. 6. an entire rectitude of heart. He will in no case dispense

with the habitual neglect of truth and uprightness ; and least of all, in our solemn prayers and addresses to himself.

To leave a station of ease and affluence, and to have to combat with various straits and hardships of an uncertain world, affords but a dark prospect. But we must willingly submit to this hard lot, when not to be avoided without deserting our duty to God and his truth. And we have great encouragement given us by our divine Master and Saviour, Christ. Matthew x. 32. " Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven." And Mark x. 29, 30. " Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come, eternal life." It is of small concern in what outward circumstances we pass over the short term of life, if we can but obtain that blessed approbation in the end, " Well done good and faithful servant ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Matthew xxv. 23.

It is a great satisfaction, at this my departure from you, that I can truly say, " I have coveted no man's silver, nor gold, nor apparel." Acts xx. 33. In nothing have I made a gain of you, or sought to enrich myself, nor am I enriched by you at all, but what was over and above the supply of necessary wants, has been freely expended in the various ways, in which it was thought might be most useful for your present benefit

and future happiness. I have not sought your's, but you. And although humbled before God under a sense of many failings and neglects; yet, in some low degree, I hope I may say, that "in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly towards you." 2 Cor. i. 12.

I have endeavoured to teach you the truth which Christ our Lord taught, as far as I was able to learn it, by an impartial and diligent search of the holy scriptures. And I often reminded you, that you were not to believe any thing because spoken by me, but to examine and compare how far it was agreeable to holy scripture, our only rule and guide. And my discourses of late years, have been altogether expositions of large portions of the New Testament, with such inferences as naturally and plainly flowed from them, that you might see it was the word of God which was endeavoured to be spoken to you and not the word of man.

In these discourses I was led continually to point out to you, that religion lay not in outward forms and ordinances even of God's own appointment, though they be helps to it; but in an entire conversion and devotedness of the heart to God, influencing to sobriety, chastity, brotherly love, kindness, integrity, in all your conversation; to do every thing out of a sense of duty to God, ever present with, and supporting us in life, and chiefly for his infinite love to us in Christ Jesus our Lord; by whom he hath called us unto his eternal glory. 1 Pet. v. 10. And that this inward sense of God, carried along with you into

your daily labours and business, would sanctify them all to you, preserve you innocent and holy, sweeten the unavoidable toils and cares of the present life, and enable you to resign it with joy and in peace.

I have often pressed upon you the duty of family-religion—That every house should be a little church as it were, wherein all the members of it were carefully instructed in the things of God, and once at least, at the close of each day, called together to join in short prayer to God, since in your way of business you can seldom meet altogether at any other time without inconvenience. This would be a constant check upon parents in their daily conduct, and would make them hasten home with pleasure after their labours were over, to worship God in their families, which would thus become orderly and happy. And this might be a means of preventing that early depravity and corruption of the youth of both sexes, which are so alarming, and from which they are seldom to be recovered, when once you have lost this season of instruction, and of forming habits of piety and virtue. “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Prov. xxii. 6.

Still more have I inculcated upon you the necessity of keeping the Lord’s day holy, in obedience to God’s primary law, when he first placed man upon the earth, never repealed since; and which was regulated anew, and confirmed by the authority and example of our Saviour Christ and his apostles—As many of each family as can be allowed, to attend the public worship of the great Creator and heavenly Father, and to be mindful afterwards of a suitable employment of your

time at home. For the spending one part of this sacred day in unnecessary worldly cares, or in sports and diversions tends to efface every serious impression made on the mind on the other part, and by degrees, leads to spend the whole of it in the same ungodly sort. Not that the service of God is to make us morose, or sad and uncheerful at this, or at any time. There are ways of passing this holy day, in walking out and contemplating the works of God, in pleasing, charitable offices to our neighbours, and in innocent, useful conversation, which will cheer and refresh both mind and body, far beyond those noisy and riotous games, always accompanied with prophane oaths, and generally ending in the alehouse, or worse.

A writer of great celebrity, though no clergyman, remarks:—"I believe it may be laid down as a certain fact, that no master or mistress of a family can have a true concern for religion, or be a child of God, who does not take care to worship God by family-prayer." Hartley.

To which I would add, that I have seldom found any serious religion in a parish or family, where the Lord's day was customarily prophaned. And, as he concludes—"Let the observation of the fact determine" in both cases.

It has been matter of deep concern to me, that I have not seen so much of the fruits of my labours as I desired among you. Parents, ignorant themselves, and refusing instruction, must, of course, neglect all godly care of their children. Very seldom do farmers meet at markets on their worldly business, without giving more or less into drunken excesses; which

shews, that they are under the restraint of no religious principle. Much bad practice and open sin, is visible in many——But I would not now complain. Let us all make haste to repent and amend—for the time is short. I would hope that more good may have been done than I know of; and that there are more truly pious than the few that appear to be so; and that some seed of the word, that has been sown, may hereafter spring up, and bear good fruit.

It will be your wisdom, and happy for you, and a cause of rejoicing to me, if, from this time forward, your lives be conducted with such Christian sobriety and watchfulness, in a daily progressive improvement in virtue and holiness, that I might be able to say, “I have laboured, and another hath entered into my labours,” John iv. 38. And that the work of my successor may be made more easy to him, from what you have learned of me. More especially, if it should please the “God of all grace,” That as Samson served his country more at his death, than in his life, you also may be more benefited by this my last farewell exhortation to you, than by what I have laboured in much weakness, but great sincerity, for the ten years that I have been with you.

Soon shall all the friendships and connections of this world be dissolved, and at an end. The parting, and the separation, which death must have made betwixt us in a few years, perhaps, much sooner, is only anticipated a little. And it may be a providential blessing to both you and me, if I may but thereby be approved, and found faithful unto the end, for which I desire the help of your prayers; and if this

my voluntary dismissal of myself from my station and ministry among you, to which I am constrained by a principle of conscience and obedience to Christ, as I firmly believe, may contribute to convince you, That the gospel of Jesus is the truth of God—the pearl of great price, Matt. xiii. 45. for which we are to be willing to part with every thing, rather than fail of obtaining it : to induce you

To do nothing now, which you shall not approve at that solemn hour, when you leave the world :

And to be ready at all times, and even desirous to have the Common-Prayer book reformed, and the public worship of God in it, made more conformable to the holy scriptures, for your own sakes, and that of your conscientious pastors, whenever it shall please God, in his providence, to incline our gracious Prince and Parliament, to set about so needful a work.

And now, O Holy Father, the blessed and only potentate, in conformity to what I believe, thy will and my duty, I resign unto thee, from whom I received them, my ministry and people. Do thou raise up unto them a faithful teacher, who shall more effectually preach thy word, turn many from sin, and bring all nearer to thee, their only portion and happiness. And graciously dispose of me, thine unworthy servant, where, and how I may be best enabled to serve thee according to the pure gospel of thy son, through whom, I desire to find acceptance with thee, now and for ever.





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**CONVERSATIONS**

**OR**

**CHRISTIAN IDOLATRY,**

*In the Year, 1791.*

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PUBLISHED BY THEOPHILUS LINDSEY, M. A.

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SECOND EDITION.

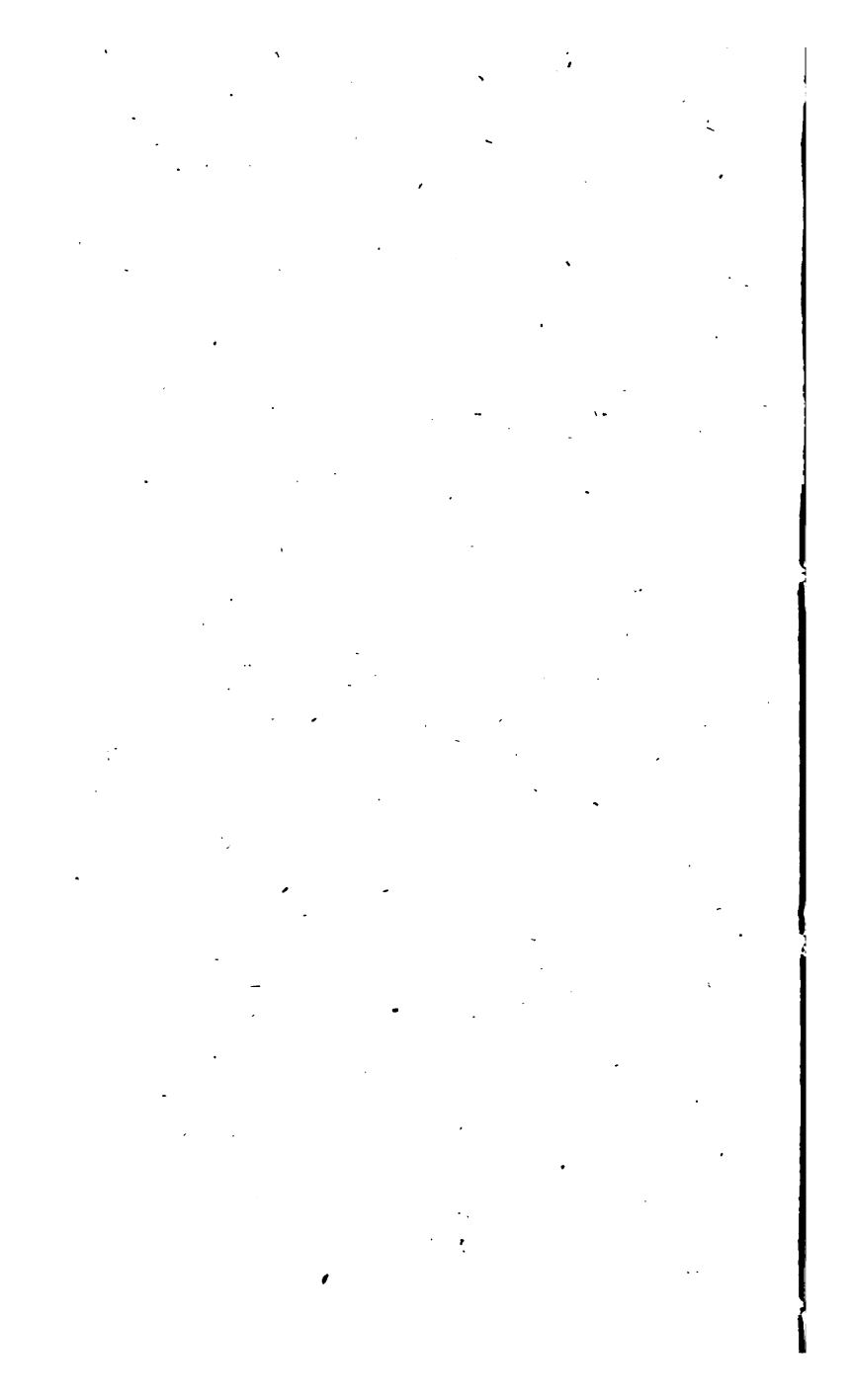
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1805.



## THE INTRODUCTION.

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**D**ISCOURSE with some private friends, concerning the justness and propriety of Unitarian christians using the term *idolatrous*, in speaking of the worship of those christians, who together and equally with the God and Father of all, worship two other divine persons, first gave rise to the thought of publishing the following conversations: which have their foundation in real life, though somewhat varied in their manner and circumstances.

But another cause urged to the publication still more powerfully.

When I was musing, and deeply impressed with the subject, a well known letter of Melancthon to Camerarius came across my mind, written soon after \* Servetus had printed his

\* This learned and ingenious physician, who was afterwards burnt alive at Geneva, merely for propagating these opinions, and persisting in them, was little more than twenty years old, when he first published his sentiments; in which he grew more confirmed, as he advanced in age. But although he could not see any grounds to think so highly of Christ as others, he entertained such reverence for him, that he is said to have died, *calling upon Christ in the midst of the flames*. And I have observed in his writings, invocations of Christ of a greater length. Socinus also, who lived some years after, whose sentiments are well known, maintained it to be even a duty to pray to Christ.

Socinus, and perhaps Servetus, held that the lordship and dominion ascribed to Christ, in the scriptures, implied, and authorized the worship of him, by prayer. Later writers also of what is called the Arian persuasion, have thought that the mediatorial office of Christ, to which they

his book against the Trinity, asserting that Christ was only a man; in which the former of these persons, noted for his humanity and moderation, very pathetically forebodes, and laments, the contentions, and miseries, but too much verified since even to this hour, that would be produced by the disputes then reviving, about \* the *logos*, i. e. the word, and the *spirit*; which are the terms used by this great friend of Luther, to denote two of the divine persons that went to compose the Trinity: but which certainly are not held out, either of them, to be gods distinct from the heavenly Father, with any very apparent degree of evidence, in the sacred writings; and therefore about which many might well entertain doubts.

And I could not help immediately saying to myself; that from the rapid progress of free inquiry, and improvement in the knowledge of the scriptures, for some years past, still daily increasing; and from the very great plainness, and perspicuity, with which the doctrine of the divine unity is deli-

ascribe much more than is to be found in scripture, warranted the worship of him; and that prayer sometimes, though not generally, might be made to him. But assuredly no delegated power or authority, which the scriptures ascribe to Christ, can authorize invocation of him in prayer, unless he himself, or his apostles, have expressly signified, that such is the will of God. A matter of such magnitude, as the setting up of a new God and object of worship, would not have been left to men's inferences, and conclusions, from phrases, which of themselves imported nothing of the kind; but would have been made the subject of a plain command. For whatever, in respect of divine worship and prayer to any person, is not commanded in the sacred writings, is forbidden.

\* Περὶ τῆς τριάδος scis me semper veritum esse, fore, ut hæc aliquando erumperent. Bone Deus! quales tragædias excitabit hæc questio adposteris, εἰ εἰν ὑποστάσις ὁ λόγος; εἰ εἰν ὑποστάσις τὸ πνεῦμα; i. e. "You know that I was always afraid that these disputes about *the trinity* would break out some time or other. Good God! what sad tragedies will take rise among those that come after us, from the controversy, *whether the logos be a person; whether the spirit be a person?*"

See an account of Calvin's treatment of Serapetus, p. 165, 166.

vered

vered throughout the Bible; it could not fail but that the gross deviations from this doctrine, among all bodies of christians, but particularly discernible in the liturgy of the church of England, a form of devotion in other respects most admirable, must soon be descried by multitudes of that communion, and excite no small ferment and disturbance amongst them, without some proper preparation, and instruction given them relating to it.

For how much soever the point has been industriously perplexed by vain learning and philosophy, there is no kind of difficulty in deciding upon it; namely, whether there be one God, one divine person, whom we are to worship; or three divine persons, three Gods, to whom we are to offer up our prayers.

There is only one book in the world to be consulted about it; the Bible. And no learning is necessary for the interpretation of that book, in this grand article; only to take it up, to learn what it contains upon the subject, and not to bring along with us to the reading of it, what *we think* it ought to contain, and have before been taught by our nurses and priests, and are resolved not to give up.

To allay, or rather to prevent such religious heats and convulsions, of all others the most to be avoided, I believed it would be of use to give to the public, what presented itself on the subject, to a select society of serious persons of good sense, conversing upon it, *viz.*—the strong evidence that was produced from scripture, of the absolute unity of God; and that the blessed Jesus received his existence, and all his powers from him\*; that in the account of God himself and of Jesus Christ, it is idolatry to pay divine honours to a creature, and of course to worship this humble but now exalted Saviour†; that, however, this idolatry of christians, in worshipping Christ, which has been of so long duration,

\* See Second Day's Conversation.

† See Third Day's Conversation.

and is so widely extended, is of a very different nature from the heathen idolatry, so severely condemned in the sacred writings, and will not affect the future happiness of those, who are sincere in it, and who having had no opportunities of knowing better, live up to the light they have: although it be a thing much to be lamented, and a continual disgrace to the gospel, and hindrance to its reception in the world; and, after various arguments, ineffectually proposed, to take off every scruple of joining with others in prayer, where it was in part offered to wrong objects in the esteem of the worshipper; something turned up at the last, concerning what might best be done by those, who could not remain in the communion and worship of the church of England, for fear of the reproach and condemnation of their own minds, in worshipping Jesus, and the holy spirit, whom they did not believe to be the gods, or to be worshipped\*.

How sorely both the churches of England and of Rome, which equally embrace and hold sacred the Athanasian doctrine, and worship, have departed from the purity and simplicity, which are expressly taught and enjoined in the sacred volume, I chuse to deliver in the weighty words, and remonstrance, of a learned and venerable clergyman † of the church

\* See Fourth and Fifth Day's Conversation.

† This pious and excellent person, of singular integrity, humility, and a patriarchal simplicity of character, had a small benefice in Sussex; and finished a laborious and useful life, at the age of 80. For some years towards the close of it, he was in very depressed circumstances, through the ill behaviour of a very near relation, to whose wants he had been too indulgent.

He made himself easy in his continuance in the church, by omitting some things in the service, and making alterations in others. Thus in the Litany, he left out the 3d and 4th invocations, those of the holy ghost, and the holy trinity; and in the 2d, instead of *O God the Son*, redeemer of the world, &c. he put it, *O Son of God*, redeemer of the world; it being his mistaken persuasion, as of the eminent persons mentioned in the preceding

church of England; who only a very few years ago, took leave of mortal things, anno 1786; hoping thereby to draw the more attention to it; and that, if his arguments, taken wholly from scripture, be powerful and convincing to others, as to me they appear, our country will not be the last to renounce a worship, proved to be directly forbidden by the Almighty himself.

*Extracts from a translation of Exodus, with notes, By William Hopkins, B. A. Vicar of Bolney, 1784.*

Note, on Exodus xx. 3. p. 145, &c.

“ But before I quit this xxth chapter of Exodus, 'tis highly expedient, if not absolutely necessary, to make some observations upon the first and great commandment, “*Thou shalt have no other Gods but Me;*” which must necessarily signify, if there be any meaning in language, *one supreme intelligent Being or Person, Lord and Governor*, endued with all possible perfection, power, knowledge, wisdom, goodness, and patience; or, as he is described in the New Testament, “*The one God and Father of all;*” and more particularly, *of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Agreeably to this plain, rational, and fundamental doctrine, and that the real *Unity of God* might appear, not only as a truth, but a truth of great importance, Moses has in the most solemn manner determined, (Deut. vi. 4.) “*Hear, O Israel, Jehovah our God is one Jehovah;*” and strongly inculcates the duty we owe to him in the verse following.

preceding note, that prayer might sometimes be directed to Christ, not as God, but as one, empowered and commissioned by him occasionally to hear it.

Mr. Hopkins's aged Diocesan, Sir William Ashburnham, to his honour, never listened to any complaints against him for his nonconformity; but on the contrary, sometimes distinguished him in public by his kind and particular notice.

“ The

“The Christian Lawgiver, our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, has established, by his express authority, the same solemn determination of Moses, by citing his very words; and, in answer to a question proposed to him by one of the Scribes: “*Which is the first commandment of all?*” And Jesus answered him, “*The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, Jehovah our God is one Jehovah.*” Our Saviour likewise inculcates our duty to the one supreme Being, in very strong terms, in the verse following.

“By what rightful authority then have the greatest mortals determined, that there are two other persons equally entitled to honour, worship, and glory with the *One supreme God*, and that they, together with him, form one supreme Being? A doctrine absolutely inconsistent with the principles of reason, and expressly contrary to above two thousand texts in the Old Testament, and above a thousand in the New, (I speak upon examination) which either strongly set forth, or necessarily imply, the *Unity* of God in the strict and literal seuse. I am afraid that the Athanasian doctrine and worship seem little less than a breach of the covenant established between God and the Jewish people in the Old Testament, and between God and all mankind in the New.

“The governors of the church should be exhorted, in the most earnest manner, to take speedy and effectual methods to review our public forms, and reduce them to the standard of scripture. In the beginning of the Litany, there are invoked Four distinct objects of religious worship, which form of worship has not the least foundation, or even colour of evidence to support it, from the beginning of the Old to the end of the New Testament; and the learned of all denominations are challenged to produce any acts of religious worship to four distinct objects.

“The Ten Commandments are read in the morning service of all the churches of England, and Ireland, every  
Lord's-day;



Lord's-day ; and at the same time, a doctrine and form of worship are kept up in express contradiction to the first and great commandment.

“ Christian professors have often condemned the Jews for their prejudices and blindness, that they do not see and acknowledge the *Messiah*, of whom there are so many clear prophecies delivered in their own scriptures. On the other hand, the Jews, I think, may with equal justice, retort a similar charge upon great numbers of professed Christians, who, though they are perpetually reading, or hearing the ten commandments, in the first of which God is declared to be *One*, in words not possible to be interpreted in any other sense, yet in defiance to the clearest and strongest light, they presume to acknowledge and worship *Three coequal Gods* in one substance. If the New Testament really maintained this absurd and corrupt doctrine, it would be an unanswerable argument that it never came from God, it being impossible that the two Testaments should contradict each other in this grand and fundamental article, the *Unity* of God, on which all true religion is founded. But, to our rational satisfaction, Moses and Christ are fully agreed in maintaining this essential doctrine, as we have already seen ; and it is the express duty of all churches, through every part of the globe, to remove all forms that break in upon this important point of the *Unity* of God.

One is sorry to have cause to remark, that it would seem, as if christians, in settling the object of their worship, had, almost from the beginning, set aside, or forgotten, this first and great commandment of heaven ; to which this worthy person is so earnest to bring them back. Of what infinite moment, and how absolutely necessary it is to have an eye always to it, is seen in the course of the conversations, to which I am now to introduce my reader.

THE EDITOR.

THE

THE  
S U B J E C T S  
OF EACH DAY'S CONVERSATION.

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THE FIRST DAY.

*Volusian objects to the worship of Jesus Christ, being called idolatrous.*

THE SECOND DAY.

*Volusian declares himself convinced, that Jesus Christ is not God, nor to be worshipped; but only the creature, and highly favoured servant of GOD.*

THE THIRD DAY.

*Volusian is satisfied that the worship of Jesus Christ is idolatrous.*

THE FOURTH DAY.

*Volusian perceives, that he cannot by any plea, reconcile himself to frequent the worship of the church of England, now that he looks upon it to be idolatrous.*

THE FIFTH DAY.

*Volusian sees, how easily, and with what honour and credit, the service of the church of England may be reformed, with respect to the object of divine worship, in which it is now sadly erroneous.*

CON-

CONVERSATIONS

ON

*CHRISTIAN IDOLATRY.*

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PHOTINUS TO VICTORIN;

*Relating the beginning of a conversation, among a select number of friends, in which Volusian objected to the worship of Jesus Christ, being called idolatrous.*

**YOU** desire to be informed of what had passed lately at \*\*\*\*\*, where several of your acquaintance are wont sometimes to meet at the hospitable mansion of our common friend, whom I shall for the present call MARCELLINUS, not far from the banks of glassy, sober \*\*\*; and there, as in a college in a purer air, discuss together a variety of subjects, new and old.

I shall have a pleasure in obliging you. But as you also wish to have it in your power to gratify others, having heard that the subject was of some importance, you will not think the few short illustrations I have given unnecessary, and will excuse the disguise put upon names and places, which you will be at no loss to understand.

THE

## THE FIRST DAY.

IT was one day during the late summer vacation, that the company being assembled in our friend's library, after talking over many indifferent matters, the conversation naturally turned on the recent riots at Birmingham, the eternal disgrace of our country, as well as of the age we live in: when Marcellinus, well versed, as you know, in things human and divine, and who loves his country and mankind, willing to make the best apology he could for such an infernal transaction, in burning the houses of peaceable citizens, and among them, of a christian and philosopher of the first rank, purely for a difference in religious opinions, laid the whole blame of it upon the laws of the state.

MARCELLINUS—These, proceeds he, encourage such dark and cruel bigotry, by making an unnatural distinction and difference between dissenters and churchmen, in not allowing the former to enjoy any civil employment, without conforming to the established religion in one of its most sacred ordinances. This makes them looked upon by all ranks with an evil eye, as dangerous persons, enemies to the church, who are not to be trusted in any office without giving such a solemn declaration of their regard for it; while at the same time they hold them in contempt for such a mean compliance and submission against their known principles. But every wise government will exert itself to discourage such a narrow, intolerant spirit, and avoid putting snares in men's way, which tend to undermine their virtue and integrity.

Locke

Locke, in his noble Letter on Toleration, which seems now to be a book almost forgotten; and others since his time, may have written ever so plainly and divinely; and have proved, that religion is a concern only between each man and his Maker, in which the civil magistrate has no business to interfere; and that no man can lawfully be abridged\* of his just civil rights for his religious sentiments and practice, whilst he demeans himself peaceably. But nothing will correct men's errors and inveterate prejudices to the contrary, which are as ancient as from the days of Constantine, the first christian emperor; and teach them what is reasonable and right, so long as the law of the state † teaches the contrary, and puts such a brand on one

\* " Those, whose doctrine is peaceable, and whose manners are pure and blameless, ought to be upon equal terms with their fellow-subjects. Thus if solemn assemblies, observations of festivals, and public worship, be permitted to any one sort of professors, all these things ought to be permitted to the PRESBYTERIANS, ANABAPTISTS, ARMINIANS, QUAKERS, and others, with the same liberty. Nay, if we may openly speak the truth, and as becomes one man to another, neither *pagan*, nor *mahometan*, nor *jew*, ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth, because of his religion." Locke on Toleration. Mr. Hollis's Edition, p. 63.

† " Take away the partiality that is used towards them in matters of common right, change the laws, take away the penalties unto which they are subjected, and all things will immediately become safe and peaceable : nay, those that are averse from the religion of the magistrate, will think themselves so much more bound to maintain the peace of the commonwealth, as their condition is better in that place than elsewhere; and all the several separate congregations, like so many guardians of the public peace, will watch one another,

that

one class of subjects, as supposes them enemies to their country for their religious opinions.

Such discouragement of dissenters, and leaving them without hope of redress of so great an evil, is a very short-sighted policy, unknown to the first princes of the house of Hanover; and which our present sovereign would be very far from encouraging, if properly signified to him. If these men, who have in trying times approved themselves to be the true friends of that family, continue to be stigmatized and aggrieved by unequal laws, they will naturally combine together, and use every lawful endeavour to procure the relief, to which they have an undeniable claim. Persuaded that they have truth and justice on their side, which cannot be confuted, nor extinguished, even by the fiery arguments lately used at Birmingham, and that the God and governor of the world is with them, they will never cease to solicit for their just rights, till obtained.

Minute politicians may be apt to make light of these remarks, as weak and superstitious. But we should all do well to take the moral governor of the world and his demands upon us, more into our plans, lest we be found, by leaving him out, only to embroil the public more in everlasting dissension and confusion.

The times are totally different from what they were fourscore or a hundred years ago. Although the experience of the present year has shewn us how blind that nothing may be innovated and changed in the form of the government: because they can hope for nothing better than what they already enjoy; that is, an equal condition with their fellow-subjects, under a just and moderate government." Ibid. p. 61, 62.

high

high churchmen and tories still are, a degree of blindness and intolerance which was utterly unexpected; nevertheless the light of truth, and the knowledge of men's civil and religious rights are increased to such a degree as cannot now be stifled, but will expand itself more and more. Men will not only think freely on these most important topics, which indeed no power can prevent; but will hold it a duty to publish their thoughts, and to act as they dictate, whilst they give no reasonable offence to the governing powers.

Marcellinus was thus rapidly going on with his free remarks, when \*\*\*\*, whom I shall name VOLUSIAN, of no small eminence in a learned and honourable profession, a warm advocate for the established church, but a greater friend to virtue and goodness, addressed himself to him somewhat abruptly.

VOLUSIAN.—I beg pardon, my friend, for interrupting the effusions of your fervent and liberal mind, which are always agreeable, though sometimes eccentric, to me at least. I declare, however, my entire acquiescence in the greatest part of what you have advanced, particularly that men are not to be abridged in any of their civil rights for their religious opinions; that the whole history of the Test-laws, and their imposition at this day upon dissenters, are a discredit as well as detriment to the country; and that it is the strict duty of every government to allow men their different religious worship after their own mode, without any penalty, restraint, or hindrance whatsoever, so long as they do nothing therein to disturb the public peace; and that this is no more a favour, than to allow them to breathe the air, or see the light of the sun.

I hope then, continues he, that it will be granted me that I am for liberty as much as any one, so far as is consistent with the peace and happiness of the whole community ; though I confess I cannot in some things go the lengths that Marcellinus would have me. All men ought certainly to enjoy their opinions, and follow what appears to them right : but there ought to be some reserve and limitation, in not permitting them to publish sentiments that are likely to throw the whole state into convulsions.

I condemn, Marcellinus, no less than you, the outrages committed at Birmingham, and the particular atrocious attempts against Dr. Priestley, and injuries done to him. And I blush at the report but too much verified, of many of higher rank rejoicing over what has befallen him ; which looks too much, as if they would not have been sorry, if, after setting fire to his house and library, he himself had been thrown into the flames with them.

But then it must be allowed that, his severe censures of the doctrine and worship of our church, and predictions of its downfall, if it do not reform itself according to his plan, may have contributed to excite, however wrongly, some of this bad spirit, which has appeared against him.

For my own part, I must declare, that when first I became accidentally acquainted with a Sermon of his preached this very year, on the anniversary of the foundation of their New College at Hackney, I was so disturbed, that I did not know what to do, or how to think of myself, on account of his so bluntly and peremptorily



peremptorily declaring the worship of Jesus Christ to be idolatrous.

Such a crude, unqualified declaration coming from so celebrated a name, must either raise passion and indignation against him, for such a rude attack upon what a man has hitherto held most sacred, the God he worships: or create gloomy fears and apprehensions, which he will not know how to quiet, about a matter of such infinite moment. In short, why disturb people about such merely speculative points, which are never fully to be comprehended, and not rather confine his teachings to what relates to a good life and practice?

MARCELLINUS.—I think, my friend, replies Marcellinus, you do not act with your wonted candour, in so directly and unreservedly blaming a christian preacher for apprizing his hearers, on a very solemn occasion, of an error of great consequence, which almost universally has obtained among christians, and for terming it, idolatry; which the worship of Jesus Christ really is, if he be so far from God, that he is only his creature, and a creature of the human race.

This is not a novel sentiment; nor is it only of late that it has been produced by this author; but which for many years he has thought it his duty to declare and to testify. There is here in the library a volume of his tracts, which contains the sermon, preached in the dissenters' place of worship at Birmingham, in 1780, on his undertaking the pastoral office among them, in which he introduces the mention of this point. And he does it with so much seriousness and calmness, that those who may not like the doctrine, will not be dis-

pleased with the preacher; and therefore, Volusian, if you will give me leave, and the rest of our friends, I shall read the passage to you. Upon the company readily declaring their assent, Marcellinus took the book, and read as follows :

—“ Of these corrupt doctrines, the seeds of which were sown in a very early age, none gives so much just cause of alarm, and therefore ought more to excite the zeal of the truly enlightened friends of pure christianity, and who wish well to its propagation among jews and mahometans, than that relapse into *idolatry*, with which many who call themselves christians are justly chargeable; an *idolatry*, similar to that which it was the great object of the jewish and christian religions to overturn. For, in consequence of the worship of saints and angels in the church of Rome, the true God is almost as much lost sight of as he was in the heathen world, who worshipped stocks and stones, under the notion of their being emblems or representatives of the divinity.

“ Though this idolatry proceeded till it came to the worship of a piece of bread, as supposed to be the real body and blood of Christ, it began with paying divine honours to Christ himself: who though the most distinguished messenger of God to man, himself uniformly asserted the proper unity of the Divine Being, and spoke of his Father, exclusively of all other persons, or beings, as *the only true God* (John xvii. 3.) his Father as well as our Father, and his God as well our God; (John xx. 17.) and whose highest title is, *the mediator between God and man, the man Christ*

Jesus.

Jesus. (1 Tim. ii. 5.) Though he reigns, he only reigns in subordination to that great being who put all things under his feet, and to whom he must at length resign his delegated authority, that God, the only living and true God, even the Father, may be all in all. 1 Cor. xv. 28.

“ In agreement with this, and with no other idea concerning Christ, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews speaks of our Lord, as being, in all respects, *like unto his brethren*; and he is elsewhere styled our elder brother. In agreement with this, we also read, that as by *man* came death, by *man* came also the resurrection of the dead. 1 Cor. xv. 21.

“ Our Saviour, therefore, differs from us, not with respect to his proper nature, but only in the great perfection of his character, and in divine communications. Agreeably to which, he himself expressly disclaims all power originating with himself; saying that the words which he spake were not his own, but the Father's that sent him, and that it was the Father within him that did the works, (John xiv. 10.) that is, the miracles which he wrought. Now what truth could there have been in this, if he had done these things by any proper divinity, or indeed any extraordinary power of his own, independent of that of his Father.

“ After the worship of Christ, the worship of his virgin mother was a very easy consequence; and then so wide a breach being once made, in the doctrine of the divine unity, there entered an innumerable host of men and angels, and in times of ignorance and superstition

perdition, many names of mere heathens, and some absolute non-entities.

“It is well known that it is this doctrine of a multiplicity of persons in the Deity, or, which is the very same thing, a multiplicity of Gods, at which jews and mahometans chiefly stumble. It is the doctrine of the proper divine unity that they are continually upbraiding the christian world with departing from: and while they consider christians as Idolaters, it is no wonder that the christian name is held in abhorrence by them, and that their conversion is effectually prevented.

“For these important considerations, though it has been, and will be a general practice, to confine my addresses from the pulpit to the enforcing of such doctrines and duties, as all christians are agreed in acknowledging, and which are certainly of the greatest importance to the happiness of individuals in this life, and the next; I shall not fail to hold up to your view, with its proper evidence, and as much energy as I can give to it, this great doctrine of the proper unity of God, and also some others nearly connected with it. I mean such as exhibit the moral character and government of God in such a light as shall make us rejoice in the consideration of our being the subjects of it; in opposition to such opinions concerning the divine nature, and his government over us, as tend to make us regard him as an object of horror.”

This liberal language was very acceptable to a people, who had been already taught to judge for themselves concerning the sacred writings, and every thing

thing that was held forth to their consideration from them, by their ministers. The gentleman, still living, whose resignation, on account of ill health, made way for Dr. Priestley, was a very accomplished scholar, and compleat unitarian, with singularly just and comprehensive views of christianity; excelling greatly also as a teacher, and in the devotional parts of his office, and adorning his doctrine by the purity of his manners.

And I have heard it reported of this gentleman's immediate predecessor, Mr. Bourne, who is still remembered by some among them with singular veneration, for his most useful and indefatigable labours, especially with respect to the younger part of his congregation; that at times, when he has been called to preach in strange places at a distance, he was wont to ask the clerk before-hand; "Well, friend! how many Gods do you worship here? and who are they?"

And that Dr. Priestley should in this free manner speak his own sentiments to a congregation, with whom he was going to be so intimately connected as their teacher, and warn them of what he believed so grievous a corruption of the gospel, seems to have been no more than a duty on his part, nor can it give just cause of offence to any one, that he should afterwards publish them for their benefit. It is the line of conduct which you, Volusian, would have pursued in the like circumstances, and with the same conviction of the truth and importance of the doctrine; for I know your ardent, honest mind. Indeed, had you a better knowledge of him, and of his unwearied labours

labours, in his department as a minister of the gospel, and in various other ways to serve mankind, it would remove many prejudices.

But if in any thing Dr. Priestley will deserve to be particularly remembered as a benefactor of mankind, it will be for the light that he has thrown upon theological subjects, and the scriptures.

And upon a general view of what he has accomplished in this way, (supposing him to be mistaken in some points, for I do not deem him infallible) he seems to have been raised up by providence, to help to preserve divine revelation and the gospel from being overwhelmed with idolatry and superstition, and from being totally rejected by the rational part of mankind.

Forgive him, if he has indiscreetly poured out too much light all at once with respect to the *divinity*; and where other great names of our nation, have hesitated, and stopt short, or have had their writings and testimony suppressed, he has brought the whole truth into open day; and hath asserted and proved, that the single person of the parent of the universe, is God, by himself, alone; and neither Christ, nor any other person, any thing but the creatures of his power, and the objects of his bounty and favour.

VOLUSIAN.—Volusian's prejudices were here a little excited, and taking up the matter with some warmth, he said; I am far from denying, that the commendations you have given to this famous person, may not be just to a certain degree. His moral character I would by no means impeach; but a restless  
love

love of novelty, and a desire of distinguishing himself by advancing singular notions, is evidently his failing. And you might be much better employed, Marcellinus, than in reading his books, which indeed follow one another with such speed, as hardly to give a man space to take breath in the intervals. They serve only to make you dissatisfied with all that has ever been said, or written, by all that have gone before him; and by the freedoms taken with antient authors and the scriptures, he seems likely in the end to lead you into the wilds of absolute scepticism.

For my part, I am content to go to heaven in the way that others have gone before me. I aim not to be wise above what is written. Being bred up, and from the scriptures well grounded in the belief, that Jesus Christ is God, and to be worshipped, and always accustomed to pay this worship to him, I cannot endure the rudeness and impertinence, to say the least, of the man, who tells me that I am an idolater in it.

PHOTINUS.—Here Photinus interposed, who had not before delivered any sentiment, and said very calmly :

I should have been better pleased, Volusian, to have heard you express yourself with less vehemence upon the subject which we have inadvertently fallen upon, and which you yourself have brought forward. I wish it may not shew that you have not sufficiently considered it, and speak without proper knowledge of the very great difficulties, to say the least, attending the opinion you espouse. May I take the liberty to ask, whether you ever, in all your life, once sat down seriously

seriously to search the scriptures, to know how many Gods there are; whether one or more; and whether Jesus Christ was one of them; as I can hardly suppose you will hold him to be the only God, which some of late have strangely maintained.

This was rather a heavy accusation, as well as a question, quite out of the ordinary rules of politeness, in which however it will be well, if we are not gone into a wrong extreme: but it shews the more rational terms on which the company lived with each other. Volusian was however somewhat piqued at being thus publicly examined as it were, about his faith, and rather hastily replied;

VOLUSIAN.—It is very extraordinary, my friend, that you should imagine me to have lived to these years, and never to have made proper inquiry after the God I worship, and to whom I owe my being. I confess I have not made the scriptures my particular study, as my profession you know leads me quite away to other things. Yet I have always read the fine moral lessons of the Bible, with peculiar satisfaction, and I have sometimes attended to the proofs deduced from the writings both of the Old and New Testament, for the divinity of Christ, and the doctrine of the Trinity, and have been entirely satisfied with them. But in general we leave these theological matters to be settled by our Divines, those especially of the upper ranks; who are so liberally provided for, that they may devote themselves to this and their other duties; and who are always ready by reason and scripture to defend the common faith, and acquit themselves so well



well in it. And being persuaded that this has been the doctrine of christians for many ages, and I believe from the very first, I must again say, that I like not to be disturbed, and set afloat at my time of life, when I have no leisure, and less relish for such intricate inquiries.

PHOTINUS.—I am much concerned, replied Photinus, if I have given you any just cause of offence ; but you must excuse me still in further saying, that you have rather confirmed my suspicions by talking in such a superficial manner of your examination of the scriptures concerning so important a subject. You would be far from acting so negligently in a law-suit, in which your own, and much more, in which another's property was concerned. Here you would take pains in examining facts yourself, and in coming at evidence, and whatever could throw light upon the matter.

And surely, how much soever your studies and thoughts may have taken another turn, and have been confined to the business of your profession ; yet as you have a firm belief of the divine revelation made in our sacred writings, and of course look for a life to come, in which you are to be responsible for the improvement of the light and talents given you ; it cannot but be a matter of some consequence to you, to see clearly with your own eyes, without trusting to those of your church and priest, who is the God you worship ; whether Jesus Christ be this God ; or whether he be his only favoured creature, messenger, and prophet, as those whom you censure maintain,

and appeal to the scriptures for the truth of their assertions.

Whatever difficulty you may suppose there to be in making this inquiry, I am convinced it will all vanish, when you set yourself in earnest about it.

To settle this point, you need not to have recourse to the fathers, as they call them, of this age, or of that age. There is no necessity of looking into the voluminous commentaries on the scriptures, of former, or the present times, which generally serve only to perplex a plain subject. The reading of the original record itself, which all profess to comment upon, and from which they form their opinions, is no such prolix business for any one, for you especially, who are in the habit of consulting old records and reading over acts of parliament.

Nor is there any uncertainty in the record itself, particularly the New Testament, from the vast variety of various readings of the manuscripts, but, on the contrary, a greater confirmation, that thereby we approximate to the very original words of the sacred writers. And for the passages to which you allude, whose genuineness Dr. Priestley calls in question, they do not at all affect the point in debate, nor detract from the authenticity of the other parts of the revelation.

My good friend, leave your divines to settle their own faith, for assuredly they have nothing to do with your's, or any body's but their own. You may be able in a few days, I had almost said in a few hours, to satisfy yourself, with your own eyes, about this  
momentous

momentous part of it, the God you are to worship.

And pardon me saying, that it is incumbent on you to do it. For, as an excellent person, (c) I remember, well observes; "other subjects contain only matter of speculation, but this immediately concerns our practice, in our daily addresses to heaven: in which a serious christian will earnestly desire satisfaction, and I think cannot have true peace, till he has used earnest endeavours to know his duty in it."

And this good effect will follow, that when you have once settled your opinions on mature inquiry, you will not be moved with what others say of you or them. For it is in general owing, either to our being in the dark concerning the grounds of our religious opinions, whether solid or not, or the being too much interested in retaining them, that we are frequently so angry and offended with other people's censure of them.

But it is time to quit the subject, which I perceive is beginning to make us all too thoughtful. Let us then take a walk upon the lawn before us, to dissipate our thoughts, and refresh ourselves with the pleasing breeze, and beautiful scenes of the country, and its various hues at this season; not a little heightened by yonder not very distant road, where busy men are hurrying along; some intent on business, others pursuing pleasure, and all right, if only due moderation and virtue accompany them.

(c) Emlyn.

## P O S T S C R I P T.

*Of the Character of Photinus, and the State of Opinions before, and in this time.*

THE real Photinus, whom you inquire after, and whose name has been assumed by your present correspondent, one of the parties in the conference I am reporting to you, was a bishop of Sirmium, of great note, about the middle of the 4th century; very learned, of unblemished character, and such engaging manners, that after he was condemned in several councils for his opinions, it was found difficult, we are told, to remove him, on account of the affection which the people of Sirmium had for him.

A contemporary historian, not favourable to his opinions, describes him as naturally eloquent, fitted to persuade men, and that he gained many to his way of thinking concerning God and Christ.

His sentiments, according to the same historian, Sozomen, were, "that there is one God Almighty, who by his own word made all things; and he did not allow the eternal generation and subsistence of the Son, but said that Christ began to be, when he was born of Mary."

He is spoken of as the disciple of Marcellus, bishop of Ancyra, and probably was a native of that city.

The bishops assembled at Sirmium, are said to have deposed him, having found that he held the doctrine of Sabellius of Lybia, and of Paul of Samosata.

Sabellius was of Upper Lybia, in the middle of the 3d century; where we are informed many bishops embraced his sentiments concerning Christ.

Paul of Samosata, who flourished somewhat later, anno  
260,

260, was bishop of Antioch, reckoned the third see in rank. There he was befriended by king Odenatus, and after his death, by his widow, queen Zenobia. She is generally acknowledged to have been a lady of a fine understanding and a very superior character in all respects, and a favourer of the doctrine of the divine unity taught by Paul. Longinus, the celebrated critic, was patronized by her.

Austin mentions some followers of Photinus, in his sermons; and says, that their opinions were, "that Christ was a man, and a great prophet, and excelled all men, the best and most knowing, in wisdom and holiness; but he was not God. They said, that the Father only is God, and Christ a man: and they denied the personality of the spirit."

Vincent of Lerins, in the next century, says that "Photinus entered upon the bishopric of Sirmium with universal applause; and that he was a man of ready wit, extensive learning, and charming eloquence, and therefore was a great temptation. He spoke and wrote properly and elegantly both in Greek and Latin, of which his remaining works are a proof, there being some in each language."

This little history, Victorin, of a man, whose writings are highly commended by writers of those times, but which have been destroyed by time, by negligence, or more probably by design, shews, how ignorant they are, who speak of unitarian Christians as a novel sect, and hardly brought into name or notice before the time of Socinus, about two hundred years ago. Whereas it may be most truly said, that there is no such thing as a trinitarian christian mentioned or supposed in the New Testament; all there named being perfect Unitarians, the blessed Jesus himself, his apostles, and all his followers. Soon after indeed heathenism and a false philosophy were imported into the church by learned men, who took the

lead in it, and who went on corrupting the doctrine of Christ, in this point, more and more; till it ended in the worship of him as being the supreme God, and of saints and of images, together with him; which lasted throughout the whole christian world, for very many ages, when, in some respects, a reformation took place in our own and some other countries. But in all this period, there were unitarian christians, sometimes fewer, sometimes in greater numbers.—No more however of this now. I have detained you too long from the sequel of the conversation at our friend's, which you are so desirous of seeing.

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## THE SECOND DAY.

*Volusian declares himself to be convinced, that Jesus Christ is NOT God, nor to be worshipped; but only the creature, and highly favoured servant of God.*

Soon after what had passed, as related in my last rescript, Volusian was obliged to quit the party on a call of business to his own house, which was at some distance; but expressed his hopes, with some earnestness, that they would not separate before he came back.

Upon his return within about a week, the next morning, when the same company were assembled in the library as usual, after breakfast, Volusian took up Griesbach's edition of the New Testament, which lay upon the table, and turning to the preface to the epistles, could not refrain from commending the integrity of the worthy and learned editor; who, although a believer in the divinity of Jesus Christ, had not allowed

allowed two of the passages commonly alleged for it to be genuine ; but had observed, that Acts xx. 28. should be read, not *feed the church* of God, but *feed the church* of the Lord, *which he hath purchased with his own blood* ; and that 1 Tim. iii. 16. should be, not *God*, but *which*, was manifest in the flesh ; and moreover, had cast out of the sacred text as spurious, the passage 1 Joh. v. 7, of the three heavenly witnesses.

VOLUSIAN.—I expect, my friends, proceeds he, you may be somewhat surprized to hear from me an eulogium of this kind ; who, although never speaking but with reverence of the scriptures, have not been wont to throw out such free criticisms upon them. But indeed there has been a great revolution in my mind, since we were last together, and I am eager to acquaint you with it.

When all of them expressed, that they had no less earnest a desire to hear what he had to tell them, Volusian resumed the discourse.

You can have no idea, says he, of the strong impression made upon me by what Photinus observed, of some even sensible and decent characters, having never once seriously taken the scriptures into their hands to examine for themselves, what they teach of God ; whether there were three divine persons, each of them God, and to be worshipped ; or the Divine Being was one person only, and who alone was to be worshipped. I was conscious to myself, that I had never done this with that attention it demanded ; and I felt inwardly ashamed and self-condemned, that  
shoul

should have perused other books with so much care and exactness, and spent so little time and thought on this, which professes in many parts to speak directly from God.

I was also much moved by what was said, of the important matter in debate, not being merely a speculative point, of which I became most fully convinced, but what I was every day <sup>be</sup> called out to act upon, viz. whether I was to look up for aid and protection to three divine persons, or to one only ; and if to three a difficulty now for the first time started into my mind, to which of them I was to give the preference, and then to invoke each. What was remarked likewise of the easiness of searching the scriptures for this purpose, and the dispatch with which it might be accomplished, gave me encouragement ; and I resolved to make the trial.

I alleged at parting, that I had some necessary business to transact, which was indeed the case ; but I had also another more pressing errand that you little suspected ; which was, to sequester myself, for a few days, to attend to this most important inquiry that could engage my thoughts, as I viewed it ; and as it really is.

No sooner then was I arrived at \*\*\*\*\*, and had finished the affair, which had called me away from you, when, with great avidity, I took the Bible into my hands, and spent a great part of the night and the three following days, before I had satisfied myself, and digested my thoughts upon what I found there. For enjoying the benefit of a large and valuable assortment  
of



of books, not all of my own collection, and many among them being of a freer cast than I had hitherto troubled myself with; upon any obscurity presenting itself in any passage of the scriptures, about which I could not satisfy myself, I could not think that I did myself or the subject justice, if I did not see what had been advanced on all sides. And this took up no small time.

I began with the books of Moses, and then went on through the other parts of the Old Testament, perusing them in order, and with all the impartiality I was capable of; endeavouring not to carry along with me any bias or prejudice one way or the other, but to be as indifferent about the result of my inquiries, as if I was reading any other book to which I was an intire stranger: for this I thought to be the only fair way of proceeding, and of coming at the truth.

When I expected to have easily found the doctrines I had been taught in early youth, and had believed upon good grounds, as I thought; particularly that of a second god, who afterwards became the man Christ Jesus; I was struck with intire astonishment in perceiving now the utter silence of those divine writings concerning any such second divine person, who was God, or any third divine person, or god, called the holy ghost, or holy spirit. I perceived on the contrary, that throughout, God speaks of himself by the personal pronoun, I, me; He is always addressed by prophets and holy men in the same way, Thou, thee; and spoken of by the third person singular, He, Him: so that if their be any power or use in words to signify  
any

any thing, or any credit to be given to the scriptures, God is ONE, one single person and no more.

I was however restrained in immediately making this conclusion, by some arguments, which I recollected to be used to prove the doctrine of the trinity from the Old Testament, and which formerly had weight with me; but which I confess, appeared to me now very trifling.

One of them was, in speaking of the creation, God said (a), *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.* And soon after (b); Behold, the man is become *as one of us.* From which sayings it is concluded, that the Divine Being addressed himself to some persons upon a rank of equality with him, one of which they suppose was the person, who afterwards became a man.

But, to say nothing more against such an arbitrary construction, and mere supposition; this plural way of speaking is thus naturally accounted for, as many learned trinitarians have acknowledged; viz. that Moses used it for the greater solemnity, to dignify his subject, when about to treat of man's creation, the chief of the works of God. Or, it may be, according to the jewish interpretation, that there is an allusion to the ancient doctrine of God being always surrounded with angelic spirits, to receive his commands and execute his purposes; to whom he now addressed himself.

Another argument, from the books of Moses, for

(a) Genesis i. 26.

(b) Gen. iii. 22.

the Trinity, also occurred, which indeed now appeared to me only to shew how much men were at a loss for real arguments ; and is taken from the plural termination of one of the names of God, Elohim ; from which it is contended, that there is a plurality of persons, as it is termed, in God.

This indeed is not perceivable in our English Bible, the translators, and I believe all translators in other countries, having very judiciously put this name of God in the singular number, as was done by the first Jewish translators of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, between two and three hundred years before Christ ; who certainly understood their own, which was the living language. Not to mention that many singular words, in all languages, have a plural termination ; and that this name, Elohim, being sometimes applied to men, it might as well be inferred, that each man had a plurality of persons in him, as that there was any thing of the kind in God.

Much weight I had also been taught to lay on some phrases in the books of Moses ; for instance, where it is said, the] (a) LORD rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire *from the* LORD out of heaven ; as if this indicated that there were two LORDS or two Jehovahs ; whereas it is only an idiom of the language, in repeating the noun for the pronoun, the LORD from the LORD, instead of the LORD rained from himself ; as might be shewn by many examples, which would equally prove that there were two (b) Solomons, or two (c) Rehoboams, &c. &c.

[(a) Gen. xix. 24.

(b) 1 Kings viii. 1.

(c) 1 Kings xiii. 21.

It has also been fancied, that there was a divine person mentioned in the Old Testament, stiled the angel of God, the angel of the LORD, or of Jehovah; who was either another Jehovah, equal in all perfections; or according to others, a second power, brought forth from God, who ministred to the supreme Father, and was his agent in making and governing the world; and who afterwards became the man Christ Jesus.

But this has been shewn to be a mistake, from not understanding the language of the scripture concerning the divine appearances, signified by the term, angel of God, angel of the LORD, in which, God is always represented as appearing, or manifesting himself, by some subordinate angel, agent, or power. But then, the angel or agent of the LORD was not always a person, or intelligent being, but often things inanimate; *viz.* an articulate voice, a pestilential wind, &c. &c. were called the angel of the Lord.

These arguments however, and every thing of the kind from the Old Testament, in behalf of two Jehovahs, or a plurality of gods, appeared to me now, as they really are, mere subtleties and ingenious contrivances, to extract a doctrine from words, which they were never intended to convey. For all conclusions from these or any of the like words and phrases, of there being more than one God, one divine person, intended by Moses, and the prophets, in their language concerning the deity, were, to my understanding, totally overturned, by this single consideration; namely, that Moses and all the sacred writers of the Old Testament, who use such language, never drew any such

Such conclusions from it, as christians have done ; did never in any way signify, that they thereby understood, or intended to teach, that there was any plurality of persons in God, strange unintelligible language ! but I observed them constantly, uniformly, invariably, and universally, throughout, to speak of God, as being one single person, as any single man is one person ; and never to intimate, that there was any other god, or divine person, but this one who was acknowledged, adored, and worshipped by them ; and who alone ought to be acknowledged, adored, and worshipped.

These two arguments then from the sacred writings of the Old Testament, which I have produced as striking me so forcibly, and which lie upon the very surface, so that none can miss seeing them, are absolutely decisive upon my mind, that there is but one God, one divine person, who is God, and to be worshipped ; and I shall beg leave to repeat them, that I may be told if there be any flaw in them.

First, God being spoken of, spoken to, and speaking of himself, in the singular number, is a proof of there being but one divine person, one God ; which no sophistry in the world can split and construe into two or more persons.

Secondly, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, and all the prophets and holy men recorded in the Old Testament, never appear to have had any knowledge of any second God, to be worshipped, such as christians have found out for them, since their time ; nor of a third divine person and god, stiled the holy

ghost, or holy spirit ; but they ever acknowledged and worshipped one God only, namely, the single person of Jehovah, the maker of all things.

And these two arguments are intelligible to the most ordinary understanding. The unlettered man, the day-labourer and mechanic, are capable of seeing their force as well as the greatest scholar, and may thence satisfy themselves, by the authority of Moses and all the old prophets, that they are not mistaken in rejecting the doctrine of three divine persons, three Gods, in opposition to all the subtle windings, by which learned divines may seek to bewilder them on so plain a subject, from the Old Testament.

There are therefore no other gods, no other creators, but Jehovah alone, the God of Abraham, the God of the Israelites, according to the doctrine of Moses and all the prophets. If there be any single, particular texts, or passages of the Old Testament, from which the contrary doctrine is inferred, they will be found to be false readings, or mistranslations, or misinterpreted : for the scripture cannot contradict itself. And I apprehend, that if we were not capable, in any of these ways, to account for one or two particular texts, which may be supposed to speak of Christ as God, although I am assured by writers I consulted, who have considered the matter, that this is not the case in any one instance ; yet, on such a supposition, we must be governed by what is found in every page, and is in agreement with the whole tenor of the book, and not by what is found in one or two places only.

Photinus

Photinus here interposed, partly with a view to give a little respite to Volusian, who was somewhat exhausted with speaking so warmly and so long together.

PHOTINUS. I am persuaded, Volusian, says he, that if you had found leisure to make the inquiry yourself, you would have been soon convinced, that there is not one particular passage in the Old Testament which teaches that there is a second divine person, or god, who afterwards became the man Christ Jesus, or a third divine person, or god, called the holy spirit. And with your leave, and that of our friends, I will give you a few specimens of those that are commonly produced.

One is concerned to have occasion to mention the gross imposition on the mere English reader, in our translation of Isaiah, ix. 5. in which a *child* who is born is stiled the *everlasting Father*. Bishop Lowth threw out this *everlasting Father*, for which there never could be the least plea, but retained the language *the mighty God*; which, however, he ought to have considered, the common English reader would interpret of Christ being the supreme God, when he knew the original was far from such meaning. A learned layman \* who very lately hath, with great accuracy and judgment, given a new translation of the whole book, thus renders this passage; "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called, the messenger of the great design; the father of the age; the prince of peace."

\* Michael Dodson, Esq.

Isaiah liii. 8. Instead of, *Who shall declare his generation ?* as if referring to some eternal generation of Christ, as is pretended ; we should read, and the men of *his generation who shall be able to describe ?*

Jeremiah xxiii. 6. Instead of, *This is the name whereby he shall be called,* the LORD or *Jehovah our righteousness*, as though Christ was Jehovah ; we should read, *This is the name by which the Lord shall call him, "our righteousness."* this is the honest translation of a worthy and learned divine of the church of England, now living.

Zechariah xii. 10. Instead of, *they shall look upon me, whom they have pierced* ; as though God could be pierced or stabbed, it being God who is speaking ; read, *they shall look upon him, whom they have pierced.* This is also the rendering of some eminent dignitaries in the church ; as also the following ;

Zechariah xiii. 7. Instead of, *Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts ;* as if Christ was fellow with the LORD of hosts ; read *Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man who is near unto me, saith the Lord of hosts.*

Micah v. 2.—whose goings forth have been from of old, *from everlasting.* Almighty God is here the speaker, and it is generally believed by christians, as it was by the jews before Christ, that the words are spoken concerning the Christ, the Messiah, as being to be born at Bethlehem, the place specified in the foregoing clause of the passage.

But the words, as Calvin and other interpreters agree,



agree, are to be understood, not of Christ as actually going forth from everlasting; but only of him, as destined in the divine mind, or by the Almighty being, before his birth, for some great design. So that this passage is no proof that Christ had any existence at the time, or before he was born of Mary.

But I beg your and the company's pardon, Volusian, for interrupting the satisfaction, which I believe we have all received, in the natural account of your disquisitions and conclusions, in this your most important search of the scriptures, and endeavour to arrive at some fixed settlement, who is the Being you are to worship; whether three divine Persons, or one only. And I hope you will gratify us with the continuation of the thread of your inquiry.

VOLUSIAN. I must be so far honest to you, as to own, says Volusian, that I really look upon myself as the person obliged by your desire to hear the further process and result of my scriptural researches, as it shews that you so far approve the methods I have taken; and I shall hope to be corrected, if in any thing you shall perceive me to have made any material mistakes. I go on then where I left off.

Not having found any second divine person or God, who was afterwards to become man, nor a third divine person, stiled the holy ghost or holy spirit, in the Old Testament, I proceeded, much agitated, to the reading of the New: which I had always looked upon as more particularly teaching two other persons to be gods, beside the Father, who also were his equals, and equally to be worshipped. And I frankly

confess, I was bewildered; I could not now tell what to think or expect. For it appeared impossible, if the two revelations, that by Moses and the prophets, and the last by Jesus Christ, came from God, that they should flatly contradict each other in an article of the first importance. In this state of mind, then, I was not so much astonished and disappointed, as I should otherwise have been, when, on examining for myself into the writings of the first three evangelists and historians of the life of Christ, I could find not the least trace of their looking upon, and considering him as God. They all uniformly agree in describing the holy Jesus as a human being, of a particular tribe and family among the jews: two of them mention his being born of Mary, by the extraordinary power of God, and the omission of this circumstance by the two other historians, is easily accounted for. They relate that at first, he was like all other children, a puny, senseless babe; growing like them in strength and understanding, as he grew in years, and making also gradual improvements in piety and virtue. When he was called forth by God to shew himself to the world, we find him indued with extraordinary gifts and powers, to fit him to act his part as a teacher and saviour come from God, and enable him to give proofs of his divine authority, that men might listen to and obey him. And at the last, having finished the work assigned to him, he willingly gave up his life, for the benefit of mankind, in testimony of the truths he taught, and of his mission from God.

If

If Matthew mentions among this heavenly teacher's last words; that he commanded to "make disciples of all nations, and baptize them *into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy spirit*:" no one, who had not already imbibed such notions elsewhere, would understand him as telling them, in such an indirect manner, at parting with them, what he had never spoken of before, namely, as some will have it, that himself was a second god equal to the Father, and that the holy ghost, or holy spirit, was a third god. But they would surely apprehend his intentions to be, agreeably to his usual meaning elsewhere, in the use of these words, Son, and holy spirit, thereby to signify, that mankind were to be initiated by baptism into his religion, which came from the supreme *Father* of all; which himself, his beloved *Son* taught by authority from him; and which was confirmed by the *holy spirit*, or the gifts of miraculous powers, first imparted to himself, and afterwards to his apostles and followers; which were so many proofs of their divine mission and authority.

It was a circumstance that made deep impression on my mind, in reading these three first historians, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, that they plainly shew by their writings, that they lived without any idea of their lord and master Jesus being any other than one of the human race, being most highly favoured and distinguished by Almighty God; and also that they were desirous, and published their respective histories, with a view, that his followers, and all others in succeeding ages, might by reading them think thus  
of

of him. How would they have been affected with concern, to hear christians familiarly calling, and invoking the holy Jesus, as God equal to the Father; him, whom they introduce rebuking a man, for even insinuating, that himself was any thing above the condition of a creature of limited and imperfect goodness: Why callest thou me *good*? there is none *good* but one, that is God (a).

The impressions I received from the attentive perusal of these three former evangelists, contributed to soften the prejudices which I had entertained, that Jesus was the *logos*, the word, spoken of in the beginning of John's gospel, and therefore God.

I could not take it into my thoughts, but that all the apostles, and evangelists, must know, who their master Jesus was, whether God or man; and must agree about it.

As to the blessed Jesus being possessed of two natures, a human nature and a divine nature, by one of which he was the most high God, and by the other a mortal creature at the same time: this is a sort of theology to which Christ and his apostles were intire strangers. It fixes an odious duplicity upon our Saviour's character, of which every honest man would be ashamed; that, for instance, when in one place, he says (b) "of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels, which are in heaven, *neither the Son*, but the Father;" he meant only that he was ignorant of it in his human nature,

(a) Matth. xix. 17.

(b) Mark xiii. 32.

not in his divine. I am ashamed to say, that I had been formerly imposed on by this senseless doctrine of the two natures : otherwise I should have thought it below all notice.

Moreover John, as well as the other evangelists, in his gospel, styles Christ directly a man, a human being, subject to sufferings and death. But God cannot suffer or die. How little have we learned, if we have not learned this? And yet how long have my eyes been shut against so plain a position, that Jesus who died could not be God, nay, must have been a mortal man. For we know not that any other intelligent beings in the universe have ever been subject to die, but those of our own species.

Nay, after his master Jesus was, by the power and goodness of God, raised to life, John introduces him even then, stiling his apostles, *brethren*, i. e. men of the same nature and country with himself ; adding moreover, that he had the same God and heavenly Father, in common with them. (a) "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God."

St. John therefore, who gives this account, from our Saviour's own mouth, after his resurrection, of his being only one of the human race, could never in the beginning of his gospel, speak of him as having been from all eternity, God, the Word, by whom all all things were made : but in language well understood

(a) John xx. 17.

by

by those to whom he writes, he thereby intended the Word, Wisdom, Power of God, which is God himself, by which all things were made; and which Word, as he goes on to say, became man, and dwelt among us; i. e. dwelt among us in the person of Jesus Christ, to whom it was imparted in an extraordinary degree.

To mention only two phrases more, used by this evangelist, by which I had been much imposed on, for want of a little attention. If our Saviour says, (a) "I and my Father are one:" he speaks in the same terms of his apostles and followers being (b) one with himself, and with God. If he speaks of his (c) own coming down from heaven, coming forth from the Father, coming into the world, he himself explains his words at the time, to the attentive reader; that he meant thereby nothing more than his divine mission and authority from God, and that his language was not to be taken literally.

But if there be any book of the New Testament, which affected me above others, as proclaiming in every page, that the blessed Jesus was no divine person, no second God or creator, equal to the Father, but only his creature of the human race, highly favoured and beloved; it was the book of the Acts of the Apostles; or rather, the account of the propagation of the religion of Jesus, by some few of the apostles and their friends, among jews and gentiles,

(a) John x. 30.      (b) John xvii. 21, 22.      [ (c) See and compare John vi. 38. i. 6. and viii. 42. xvi. 28.

after their master's resurrection, and being carried up to the heavenly regions.

To allege a few out of many instances.

Peter, in his first public discourse to the Jewish people, in his own name and that of the rest of the apostles, speaks of Jesus as being a (a) man like all others, distinguished only by extraordinary gifts and powers from God; and after charging them with putting so holy a person to death, tells them that God had vindicated his innocency, by raising him to life in three days, and by *making him both Lord and Christ*. From which, by the way, we learn, that when we call Jesus our Lord we are to understand him to be only such a Lord, as almighty God hath made and appointed him.

Soon after, the apostles, Peter and John, (b) in one and the same discourse, twice stile their master, Jesus, God's servant. And it is observable, that they do this, after his having been taken up into heaven.

We have next all the apostles, in their joint prayer, Acts iv. 24—31, by the mouth of Peter, with great solemnity, invoking God, as the sovereign lord and master, and in the same breath, stiling Jesus, twice, his servant.

It is to be noted, that the apostle John joined in this prayer, in twice stiling Jesus the servant of God. And this is another proof, that in the beginning of his gospel, nothing could be farther from his thoughts

(a) Acts ii. 22, 23, 24, 36.

(b) Acts iii. 13. 36.

than to speak of Jesus as God, the Word, by whom all things were made.

It is a proof also, that if there be any texts in John's epistles, which speak of any other God but one ; or that make Jesus to be God, they must be spurious, or false readings. For it is impossible, that the apostle, or that any person of sense, in his right mind, should so directly contradict himself.

The address of Stephen to Jesus, which I had been taught to consider as being a prayer to him as God ; was a single request, offered in peculiar circumstances, when under the (a) impressions of a visible appearance or representation of Jesus before his eyes ; and therefore cannot properly be called a prayer as to God ; and particularly when at the very same time he calls Jesus, *the Son of man*. When the holy martyr kneeled down (b) after this, it was in solemn prayer, to the sovereign Lord of all, to forgive his murderers, after the example of his master Jesus in a similar situation.

When our Lord, soon after this, is represented as appearing to Paul, and saying ; (c) " I am Jesus whom thou persecutest ;" it was acknowledging himself to be the man, who went by that name upon earth.

We have next the manner, in which Christ was preached to the gentile world. The apostle Peter, in an intercourse which he had by divine direction, with

(a) Acts vii. 59, 55, 56.

(b) Acts vii. 60.

(c) 1b. ix. 5.

Cornelius,



Cornelius, the Roman centurion, and his friends, does not inform them, that Jesus was God ; but a man, (a) with extraordinary powers from God.

There are few things that deserve more to be remarked and remembered, than the manner of St. Paul's preaching the gospel in the Areopagus at Athens : where he informs his audience, that there was but one single person, who was God, the (b) sole creator of all things ; and that there would be a day of future account, in which one of mankind, Jesus, whose doctrines he delivered to them, was appointed to be the judge ; of which God had given the fullest assurance by raising him from the dead.

This is a most important declaration. It enables us to understand those few passages in St. Paul's epistles, in which he has been supposed to contradict himself in this respect, so as to speak of Jesus Christ as God, or the object of prayer ; and may satisfy us, that those passages are not genuine, or are misinterpreted by us.

2. It teaches us likewise, that in those instances, where this apostle ascribes a creation to Jesus Christ, he does not mean the creation of the universe, which he here ascribes to God alone ; but a moral and spiritual creation, the reformation of mankind by the gospel, as has been well shewn to be the just explanation of his words, by many learned persons.

It struck my mind very much in going over some of the preceding facts, that an argument might be formed from them, by which the mere ploughman, who

(a) Acts x. 38.

(b) Ib. xvii. 24, 31.

consulted his Bible, might confute the ablest divines, who should take upon them to prove from any thing dropt in the epistles of Paul, or of the other apostles, that Jesus Christ was God, and to be worshipped.

For he might say to them, “Sirs, I am persuaded that with all your learning, you must be exceedingly mistaken, in pretending that the apostles in their epistles teach Jesus Christ to be God.

“For the apostle Paul, who wrote so many epistles, could by no means intend to teach any such doctrine in them, because, in his speech to the Athenians, he declares, that God, who made the world, was one single person; and that Jesus, who was ordained to be the future judge of the living and dead, was a human creature, most highly honoured by Almighty God. You must be mistaken therefore in your interpretations, and your learning misleads you, in making Jesus to be God. For, be assured, St. Paul was an honest man, and a man of sense, and could not so flatly contradict himself, in saying any thing of the kind of one, whom he himself describes to the learned people of Athens as a man only.

“And so also a person the most unlearned might confute the greatest divines, who should attempt to prove Jesus Christ to be God, from any of the epistles that remain of the other apostles; of James, Peter, Jude, and John: and might say; “Sirs, these apostles joined with the rest in that solemn prayer to God, in which they twice call Jesus, God’s servant: therefore you must misapprehend their meaning, or  
their

their words must have been wrongly put down, if you would from them prove Jesus to be God. In little things, the apostles might mistake, and vary from themselves; but not in a matter of such vast importance, so as to say in one place, that Jesus was the servant of God, and in another, that he was the most high God himself."

After the survey of this prodigious accumulation of evidence, from both the Old and the New Testament, against my former opinions, I declare to you, my friends, I could scarce believe my senses, that things were really such as I had found them: but that rather all was a dream.

So plainly did it appear to be laid down in the scriptures throughout, that even a child of any tolerable understanding might easily be taught to see, that God is strictly One, one person; and the blessed Jesus nothing but his favoured creature and servant.

And yet, all the Fathers as they call them, almost from the first, i. e. all the great divines and christian writers of all countries, with some few exceptions, whose writings have been suffered to remain; popes, patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, all the councils and synods, the great churches in every country, the Greek church, the church of Rome, the church of England, all of them, in all ages, to the present, have held and maintained, and still hold and maintain, that the single person of the Father of the universe is not God by himself alone, but that there are three divine persons, who are each of them Gods, and each

of them equally to be worshipped, and that Jesus Christ is one of them.

And thus all these great and learned of the world, have been so blind in all ages, and continue so to this day, and of course all christian people, who are influenced and governed by their example, so as not to have seen, or yet to see, what I have seen and hope to have in some measure demonstrated, to lie upon the very surface, and to be visible, literally speaking, in every page of the Bible, where the name of God is mentioned; *viz.* that there is but one single person, who is God alone, and creator of all things, Jehovah, the supreme Father.

I knew not at first what to make of such amazing defection from the true doctrine of the scripture, in this important point, and of so long duration, nor could I gain any composure of spirit about it; till I considered, that many at first, and all in these latter ages, might, through the force of education, have taken this tritheistic doctrine upon trust; and have been under the common delusion which I was; that it was a mysterious subject, to be settled by learned men, and not to be pryed into with too-curious eyes, but believed: and they had not the good fortune to meet with those gentle hints and friendly admonitions, which I have formerly as well as lately received from you, my friends, at different times, although they made little impression to any purpose till now.

If I am in any thing mistaken, I desire some one will in charity shew me my error; will point out to me, if there be any but one single person, Jehovah,  
the

the Father, who is God, and to be worshipped, mentioned either in the Old or New Testament.

But indeed, taking the whole evidence of revelation, from the beginning to the end, it appears to me, from the few particulars I have summed up, such an absolute demonstration of the Divine Unity, as is not to be resisted. And when superstition, prejudice, power and interest, shall lose their hold on men's minds, in this article, all must see this evidence : and I am willing to hope, that the world is coming to that point.

But I feel myself agitated by this total change of my sentiments, with respect to the Being I am to worship, to a degree which I cannot describe ; and many thoughts crowd in upon me, which I have not had time to digest, and in which I must hereafter beg your kind assistance.

But still, however wrong, I cannot look upon myself to have been an idolater in the worship, which I have hitherto paid to Jesus Christ. Though a mistaken, I cannot look upon myself to have been a wicked man in what I did, and therefore not under the condemnation of God, as that language implies. However, as you have asserted, that Jesus Christ being a creature, the worship of him is idolatrous, I confess this disturbs me much, and I shall not be at rest till I have an opportunity of hearing you farther upon the subject, if I have not already tired your patience quite out.

The fervour and force of argument, with which Volusian gave this account of the alteration of his

opinions, with respect to the object of Christian worship, from the mere reading of the scriptures, moved every one present ; and they declared themselves interested as much as himself, that the conversation might be renewed at as early a day, and short an interval, as possible.

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## P O S T S C R I P T.

### *Containing Remarks on the Apostles' Creed.*

SOON after the former conversation, whilst Volustan, with no small impatience, was waiting to have the subject resumed, he was much mortified by the arrival of a large company, who came to pay a visit of several days, and were composed of persons by no means of a speculative turn ; who would have taken it ill to have had their amusements interrupted by grave discourses about religion, and especially by any the most distant censures upon that which was established in the country ; which they held sacred, and not to be touched or altered on any account.

They were, however, not a little disconcerted in this respect, by a very innocent incidental remark that was made the morning they went away ; when, the discourse happening to turn upon Sunday-schools, and a very general commendation being given of them, a blunt gentleman (a) present said, that he hoped among other good

(a) \*\*\*\*\*, whom you well know, and whom I shall call Synesius ; learned, of a singular turn of mind, a professed admirer of the church, though seldom seen within its walls ; but of a life better regulated than that of many who are more frequent in their attendance.

regulations,

regulations, about which the clergy and gentry in many parishes took such laudable pains, they would bestow their attention in procuring a correction of some few things in the catechism of the church of England, for the benefit of their young people ; which loudly called for it.

But I shall name only one, says he, which is to be met with near the beginning of the catechism ; when, after repeating the Apostles' creed, the child being asked, " What dost thou learn by these articles of thy belief ? " He is made to answer, " First, I learn to believe in God the Father, who hath made me and all the world. Secondly, in God the Son, who redeemeth me and all mankind. Thirdly, in God the holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me and all the elect people of God."

Now this seems plainly to put into the child's mouth, false reasoning, and wrong conclusions, and to make it assert what upon the very face of the thing is not true. For the Creed begins with declaring, that there is one God, the Father Almighty, and maker of all things ; and never says any thing of any *God the Son*, or *God the Holy Ghost* : but merely that Jesus Christ, the only or beloved son of God, was born of Mary, a jewish woman, and put to death by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor in Judea : adding afterwards, that there was a Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit to be believed in ; whatever was to be understood by it. But there is no intimation given, that these two last named, the *Son* and the *Holy Ghost*, are each of them Gods, as well as God, the Father Almighty : which, nevertheless, the poor children are made to declare, that they believe to be taught by the Creed.

The guests were particularly offended with the rudeness, as it was called, of these remarks. One lady in particular, a great admirer of the composition and close reasoning of the Creed of St: Athanasius, observed that the gentleman might have chosen a more proper subject to  
descant

descant upon ; that there was no occasion for so much exactness in teaching young children ; and that if the doctrine of the Trinity was not in so many words to be found in the Apostles' Creed, it might easily be understood to be comprehended in it, as there were the names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ; and it was a doctrine which all knew was to be found in the Scriptures.

There being no reply to be made to such a long string of suppositions without proof, the gentleman begged pardon for having given offence inadvertently, and so the matter ended. Soon after the strangers took their leave.

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### THE THIRD DAY.

*Volusian is satisfied that the worship of Jesus Christ is idolatrous.*

VOLUSIAN.—When they were gone, Volusian remarked, how easily we were all imposed upon by taking things, in our early youth, upon trust, as infallibly true, from our parents and teachers, and in consequence adhering to them without examination ever afterwards, and this to such a degree, as not to endure their being called in question by others. This, proceeds he, seems to be the state of mind of the company just gone, and might have been mine, had I not enjoyed the advantage of friends of a more liberal cast, who are for bringing all things to the test of reason and scripture. But from this little ventilation of the matter, for which we are extremely obliged to Synesius, I now see, what I own I never before attended



tended to ; that the Apostles' Creed, so called, the oldest of all the Creeds, though not drawn up by the Apostles, is perfectly Unitarian : which affords a strong proof, that the Christians immediately following the Apostles were also perfect Unitarians. How does light break in from all parts, when the bandage of superstition is once taken off the eyes, as from mine lately ! In such a state, the progress from error to truth is most rapid ; of which I have had happy experience, whose opinions in so short a space of time have undergone such a total change, that from having looked upon the Holy Jesus all my life as the Supreme God, I am convinced by evidence, which must in time convince all the world, that he was only a mortal Being, most highly favoured and beloved of God.

But although I am now entirely satisfied about this, I can by no means allow, as I before remarked, that I was an idolater in worshipping Jesus Christ in the days of my ignorance ; or that all my friends and acquaintance, who still worship him, are idolaters ; or my ancestors, and the whole Christian world now, and for ages past. For idolatry is represented in the sacred writings as a heinous sin, for which men are liable to the severe displeasure of Almighty God : an idea which I cannot entertain of any, who are sincere, however erroneous, in their worship of Jesus Christ. If I am mistaken in this matter, I beg to be set right.

PHOTINUS.—I do not wonder, Volusian, replied Photinus, that your fair and honest mind should reject such an unworthy thought, concerning the  
righteous,

righteous, moral Governor of the world, as that he should condemn his frail offspring of mankind, and subject them to the most lasting sufferings, for opinions, which however wrong they might be, were held by them very innocently; often the effect of early prejudice, hardly ever to be overcome; or owing to a superstitious awe and dread of inquiry into certain subjects, or the want of opportunity of better information; of which class were you yourself, and thousands and ten thousands now, and in former ages, who have joined in the idolatrous worship, which has prevailed in the Christian church, in all countries.

But the idolatry, against which the judgments of God were denounced in the sacred writings, was very different from that which has obtained among Christians. We find from Moses, that the heathen worship of their false gods in his time countenanced and encouraged the grossest lewdness, and the most shocking vices, nay, that these made a part of it. And in later times, among the polite Greeks and Romans, the most horrid enormities and unnatural practices were boasted of, as sanctified by the examples of the deities they worshipped; so that the idolatry of the heathens was threatened with such severe punishment of old, not as a speculative error, but because it was attended with the most shocking vice and immorality.

But nothing of this kind can be charged upon the idolatrous worship of Christians, that it directly encourages vice and wickedness. And although the Almighty  
and

and infinite Being is dishonoured and degraded by his creatures, being put on a rank and in competition with him, and made the objects of prayer and divine worship; and much detriment to the morals of many indirectly results from it, which are things greatly to be lamented: still those who act thus under a state of invincible ignorance, must be acknowledged guiltless. So that you may make yourself easy, Volusian, as to your former practice in this respect, though you can by no means be cleared from the imputation of idolatry in it.

VOLUSIAN.—You have given me some satisfaction, replies Volusian, in the mitigated account of the idolatry, with which, without scruple, you charge the Christians' worship of Jesus Christ. But you seem to have forgotten, that you have not yet proved your accusation, nor shewn wherein their idolatry lies.

PHOTINUS.—I beg your pardon, says Photinus, and thank you for reminding me of my fault, and of what I ought myself to have attended to. I shall therefore make the attempt to verify my assertion: and as I hold it to be a matter of great moment, I hope I shall express myself so as to be intelligible, not only to you, but to all the Christian world, if it could hear me.

Idolatry then I call the worship of false gods, the paying of divine honours to a creature.

And such idolatry is forbidden by the light of nature. For reason teaches the diligent searcher into the origin of himself and the universe around him, that every thing is the workmanship of one wise, benevolent, all-governing

governing mind, one God, one gracious Power, who gives all things to all, and is therefore to be acknowledged, adored, and thanked by all.

And this natural light, our reason, which is a ray of the divine intelligence, and given by our Maker, prohibits the worship of any other but him; because to pay the like worship to any other being, would be to deny that we receive every thing from him, and depend upon him for every thing; and also because it is a most shameful dishonouring of God, to rank his creatures on the same line with him: for all beings besides are his creatures. It is also not only absurd, to pray to beings that cannot hear or help us; but must likewise fill the mind with darkness and superstition. For inferior beings, nearer our own level, will soon be supposed pleased with what pleases our own passions and fancies, outward pomp and ceremony, fine speeches and costly offerings; and in these religion will be chiefly placed: whilst God, infinite in holiness and all goodness, who has nothing that is imperfect in common with his creatures, none of their wants and passions, will always be approached by them with serious recollection and awe, and as one who is only to be pleased with virtue, and inward rectitude and goodness in his worshippers.

But as the greater part are not disposed, nor have leisure, thus to trace out the creator in his works, and to discover what is the true worship they are to render to him; it pleased the Divine Being, from the beginning, in extraordinary ways, to make himself and his perfections known to mankind; and in process of time  
to

to deliver in writing to one nation, chosen from the rest, but in some respects for the benefit of all, a code of laws; the first of which, as of most importance, and what evidently concerns every rational being to know, is that which relates to the divine unity, and is expressed in such terms as are plain to every understanding; God himself, in person, if we may so speak, condescending to declare to the people of Israel, (a) "I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other Gods but me."

By this commandment, all beings and persons whatsoever are excluded from being God, and from being worshipped as God, but the single person who speaks; and who, as he goes on to say, made heaven and earth, &c. viz. was the creator of all things.

Should any Christians object that this command related only to the Israelites, to whom it was delivered; it may be observed, that our Saviour himself, who was one of the Jewish nation, and most sacredly observed himself, and inculcated on others, the commandments of God; in one place, being asked (b) "which is the first commandment of all? Jesus answered the man, The first of all the commandments is; Hear, O Israel, The LORD our God is one LORD;" referring to the authority of Moses, and replying in some words of (c) his.

(a) Exodus xx. 2, 3.

(b) Mark xii. 28, 29.

(c) Deut. vi. 4.

As then there has never been a solemn, formal abrogation of this first commandment of God, declaring himself to be God alone, and alone to be worshipped; nor any authoritative declaration from God at the same time, that there were two other new divine persons, two new gods, upon an equality with himself, who were to be admitted, and worshipped; we must therefore of necessity adhere to and abide by the unrepealed divine command, that God is one single person, God by himself alone, and alone to be worshipped; especially as Jesus himself has ratified this command of Moses. As therefore you are persuaded, that the blessed Jesus is a creature of God, who received his being and all his powers from God, it must be a direct violation of the first commandment of God, and nothing less than idolatry in you, to call him God, and to worship him, if the testimony of God, of Moses, and of Jesus Christ himself, be of any value with you.

Here Volusian appeared to be much moved; and after pausing some short space, was going to speak, the eyes of the company being fixed upon him; when Synesius, who seemed willing to take upon him the part of a moderator, starting up with a sort of apology, thus began.

SYNESIUS.—I am sorry to break in upon you, my friends, in the midst of so interesting an inquiry, and when all of us seem desirous to know Volusian's determinations upon the matter. But a little respite may do him no harm, as his nature is ardent; and sometimes a more indifferent spectator may see what escapes

escapes an actor, who is more immediately and deeply engaged in the scene.

Permit me then to remark, Photinus, that if this definition of your's of idolatry be allowed, and I do not see how it can be controverted, it will not prove that the members of the church of England are idolaters in their worship of Jesus Christ. For they themselves think the contrary; and are persuaded, that in worshipping both Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost, together with the Father, they worship one God only, though you charge them with worshipping three. And surely persons ought to be judged by their own intentions, and not by the construction that others put upon their actions. To you they may appear idolaters; to themselves they are by no means such.

PHOTINUS.—I am really obliged to you myself, says Photinus, for throwing out such an objection, which to many will seem to be of weight, and certainly deserves to be considered. But you will allow me to say, that I do not think you have sufficiently attended to what you advance on this point, nor to the wrong conclusions, to which such a way of arguing will lead you: it will appear that it cannot be admitted: For,

If men's own thoughts concerning themselves will exculpate them in this matter, it will follow that there never was such a thing as an idolater in the world. For the worshippers of the Virgin Mary will clear themselves from the imputation of idolatry in praying to this dead woman, and to other dead persons called saints,

because they think them to be alive, and are also persuaded, that they who worship them have the allowance of God himself to address them in prayer, as mediators, and intercessors with him for them.

Then also might the worshippers of Baal have told the prophet Elijah, that he accused them falsely of being idolaters: because whatever he thought, they were persuaded, that Baal was a god, and heard their prayers.

No. Depend upon it, if Jesus Christ be a creature, of which Volusian is perfectly convinced, the worship of him is as much and equally idolatrous, as the worship of his mother Mary.

Our thoughts, imaginations, persuasions, convictions, concerning our actions, cannot alter their nature; cannot make that right which in itself is wrong, though they will excuse us in doing it, in proportion to the degree of darkness and insuperable ignorance, under which we labour. Religious worship of, prayer to, a creature, is certainly idolatry, unless any one can produce an express command from God to authorize it. But that is another consideration of the matter, and quite beside our present purpose.

**VOLUSIAN.**—Volusian listened with great attention to this conversation between Synesius and Photinus; and immediately after, taking up the subject under apparent anxiety of mind, thus began.

I now fully perceive, that by this declaration of the Almighty Being to the Israelites, and prohibition of the worship of any other being or person but himself, not only, what indeed I always thought, the heathen  
worship



worship of the heavenly bodies, *i. e.* the natural deities, and of the artificial gods, dead men and women. Jupiter, Juno, Venus, Mercury, &c. is condemned, and the similar worship among Christians, of the Virgin Mary, and other dead persons : but, as I am persuaded, that the blessed Jesus was a human being, as much as his mother Mary, though invested with extraordinary divine gifts and powers, the truth obliges me to confess, that the worship of the son is equally idolatrous with that of the mother. I cannot defend the worship of the one, any more than that of the other. Nor could I do it, if instead of being a man, Jesus had been the highest archangel, and first in the order of time and dignity, next to the Almighty Being. For still he would have been a creature, and at an infinite distance from HIM that made him, and no object of religious worship, unless he had been so appointed.

I am also convinced, that no plea of ignorance, or good intention, will excuse the worshippers of Jesus Christ from being ranked as idolaters, which will not also exculpate the worshippers of the Virgin Mary, and of the heathen gods.

Truth then forces me to confess, that the worship paid to Jesus Christ, or to any other person but God himself, is idolatry ; as surely as there was ever any such thing as idolatry in the world.

I cannot however describe to you how much this avowal costs me, and what pain it gives me to think as I am constrained to do, of myself, and of all around me. For according to my present view of things, I behold myself, my relations, friends, and acquaintance,

to say nothing of others *ad infinitum*, involved in idolatry, by worshipping him as the supreme God, who is not above the condition of a creature.

The whole company was much struck with the manner in which Volusian spoke his feelings and deep concern, upon his new discovery of the deplorable state of the christian world, and their darkness with respect to the true object of divine worship.

PHOTINUS.—When Photinus, addressing himself to him, said; I am not surprised, Volusian, at the great emotion with which you express yourself, on the prospect, that on the sudden, as it were, opens itself upon you. A pious, feeling mind cannot be indifferent in seeing his fellow-creatures enveloped in supersition, and ignorance of the God that made them, especially such as are endeared to us by particular ties of affection and friendship.

But then, we must not suffer ourselves to be too much disquieted at their being involved in such unhappy errors, even if it be out of our power to remedy them; because they may be very innocent in the midst of them.

It will be well for you always to remember the distinction betwixt heathen and christian idolatry, which was just now noted to you. The former is that alone which is mentioned in scripture, and is so severely condemned, because it directly led to and licensed vicious and immoral practices. Whereas the idolatry of Christians in worshipping Jesus, the founder of their religion, as the supreme God, a corruption brought in first by learned heathen converts, altho' it has been and is productive

productive of numberless evil consequences, does not directly lead to any thing wicked.

And this idolatry of Christians now is an error of their education, a wrong bias of the understanding, not of the heart, and will not be imputed to those who enjoy not the means of correcting it.

You should therefore accustom yourself to look upon the idolatry of your family, friends, and acquaintance, as upon any other great errors concerning God, and his righteous administration, with pity and concern; and where it is not in your power to rectify them, by no means to think they will thereby be prevented obtaining the favour of God and their share of future bliss, if their lives have been virtuous, and they have sincerely followed their convictions, and the light they have received.

But how far those are acceptable to God, and innocent, who, believing Jesus Christ to be a creature, do nevertheless customarily join with others in the worship of him as the supreme God, is another, and a very serious question.

I think, however, my friend, that as you and many others are under such full convictions, that the worship of Jesus Christ is idolatrous, as it truly is, there is no reason, why you should be at all reserved, on proper occasions, in calling it such. Perpetual silence about it would seem to be owing to an illaudable fear, and delicacy, like what the poet alludes to;

“ Nor mention hell to ears polite.”

After so many ages that Christians have slept in this idolatry,

idolatry, the holding of it up to view as such in reality, appears to be the only way left of awakening them out of it; and of keeping others from falling into the same unhappy slumber, and continuing in it. In the mean time, by means of such polytheism almost universally prevailing, undeserved disgrace and discredit are brought upon the christian name, as countenancing the worship of three gods, of whom one had been a dead man, which the heathens in scorn upbraided us with very early. And thus innumerable multitudes are continually turned aside from the gospel, choosing rather to follow nature's light, or else losing themselves in the mazes of a dreary Pyrrhonism.

The most orthodox in our own country have had no scruple of terming the worship of Christ idolatrous, if he be a creature. The famous Dr. Waterland, in one place, says; (a) 'All creatures whatsoever are effectually precluded from receiving any religious homage and adoration, of any kind or degree; and to worship Christ, considered as a creature, is idolatry.' An eminent dissenter, on a public occasion, declares; (b) 'Prayer is one of the principal branches of religious worship, which is the peculiar prerogative of the great God: if men therefore make the object of it a creature, then are they guilty of downright idolatry.' And this very year, a learned man of the church of England thus pronounces; (c) 'If this doctrine of the

(a) Waterland. Def. p. 231, 252.

(b) Dr. Hughes's Sermons at Salter's-Hall, Vol. II. p. 8.

(c) The origin of Arianism disclosed, p. 4, 5. by the Rev. Mr. Whitaker.

‘ Trinity be false, then nine tenths of the Christians, throughout every age and in every country, have been guilty of idolatry ;—of an idolatry, more gross than that of the Papists at present, because not merely the worship of saints, and of angels, in subordination to God ; but the worship of a *creature* along *with* the creator, placing him equally with God upon the throne of the universe, giving God a partner in his empire, and so deposing God from half his sovereignty.’

The last author, however, is far from allowing nine tenths of the Christians, throughout every age and in every country, to have been guilty of such idolatry. But what he puts only hypothetically is indeed a melancholy truth ; that there has been, and perhaps is, such a large proportion of idolaters among Christians throughout the world ; since for fifteen centuries past at least, to the present day, the christian world (with some exceptions, more or less, in every age) instead of worshipping the supreme Father and only true God, whom the blessed Jesus worshipped, and taught all to worship, have together, and equally with HIM, worshipped Jesus himself, and another divine person of their own invention ; but this last, called the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit, begins now to be given up by not a few ; to say nothing of the idolatrous worship of saints, or dead men and women, without end.

But we have now a prospect of better days of light, and of the knowledge of God, and of his true worship, from various causes, and particularly from the happy disposition in the nation, to put it in the power  
of

of all our fellow-creatures and countrymen, in the very lowest ranks, to read the scriptures for themselves. And no capital error, of heathen or christian growth, can long stand before the Bible.

SYNESIUS.—Well, gentlemen, here pleasantly interposed Synesius, I have sat more patiently than I thought I ever could have done, to hear this charge made out against us all, of being idolaters; and not only us of the church of England, but against all the great churches in the world, and of course the bulk of professing Christians in them. We are obliged to Photinus, however, for the sweet which he has mixed with his bitter potion, by telling us, that our idolatry, so long as it is a mere error, and we have not the opportunity of knowing better, will not of itself unfit us for heaven's bliss.

But what is next to be done? for I am apprehensive Volusian will not rest here.

VOLUSIAN.—You rightly judge of me, replies Volusian; I cannot remain as I am. But I should be sorry to trouble you or the rest of my friends, on the subject any longer at present. It has been growing too serious and interesting for some time, not to call for a little respite and relief to you, my friends, at least. One thing, however, I think myself bound in all fairness to own, before we part.

I begin to be afraid, that my reluctance to allow the worship of Jesus Christ to be called idolatrous, after I was convinced from scripture, that he was merely a creature of God, had too much of worldly prudence  
and

and caution in it ; though not distinctly perceived by myself.

I seem to have been withheld by a secret thought and apprehension of not being able to join any longer in the public established worship, with my relations and friends, as I had been accustomed all my life, but being obliged entirely to withdraw from it. This certainly now appears to be the unavoidable consequence of looking upon the service of the church as idolatrous ; and opens to me a prospect full of difficulties and embarrassments.

But let us walk out, and enjoy the sun's reviving beams, which will tend to dispel uneasy thoughts, and inspire us with pleasant and cheering ideas.

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### *P O S T S C R I P T.*

THE foregoing day's conversation had left not only Volusian, but others of the company, in solicitude and suspense, about a matter, in which the present peace of their minds was much concerned. After the interval of a few days, when they were all collected together as usual, and amusing themselves in the library, according to their different tastes, Volusian, after some little preface, proceeded in the manner as is related in the next conversation.

## THE FOURTH DAY.

*Volusian perceives that he cannot, by any plea, reconcile himself to frequent the worship of the church of England, now that he looks upon it to be idolatrous.*

**VOLUSIAN.**—I HOPE I shall be excused in being importunate with you, my friends, so soon to resume the very grave subject, which has lately engaged your attention. But really, it has lain upon my mind so much, that I have not been able to turn myself to any thing else; nor shall I be at rest till I come to a satisfactory decision upon it. You will easily recollect, that the inquiry was, how a person should act, as in my case, upon discovering, that the established worship of the country, in which he was bred, and to which he had been accustomed, was, in his apprehension, idolatrous? Whether he should refrain entirely from such worship, or what other method he should adopt?

Upon this, Synesius immediately rose up, and told them, that the subject had occupied much of his thoughts, since they last discoursed upon it, and he hoped that he had fallen upon an expedient that would satisfy them all.

**SYNESIUS.**—Indeed, my good friends, continues he, I would not have you perplex yourselves any more about the *public* worship of the Almighty Being; which it would be better to abandon intirely.

All right worship is in the heart within. There the  
Great



Great God can alone be properly revered and adored. True piety is a personal thing, with which others have nothing to do. It loses its value entirely, when exercised with a view to others: it is diminished by being known to them. It takes its rise in the heart, from a deep-felt sense of the Divine Being, of his constant presence with, and goodness to us; prompting us to offer him our unceasing thanks, and humbly to desire of him help and direction to avoid the paths of evil, and follow virtue, that we may secure his protection and favour: all which is private, and concerns the individual only.

The moment you mix together with others in the worship of God, you are in danger of being misled by a thousand fancies, and idle superstitious forms and practices, and the meritorious repetition of certain words, like so many charms, which have been made a substitute for real holiness and virtue. Whereas no such corruptions can take place, if a man has to do only with God and his own heart, in private.

PHOTINUS.—Whilst the company were pausing, and quite surprized at this unexpected censure and condemnation of the public worship of the Creator, Photinus, addressing himself to Synesius: Your observations, says he, Synesius, on the seat of true piety, and its nature, shew that you entertain a very just sense of it; but surely your view of the subject must have been very contracted, not to see, that the worship of God in public is so far from being detrimental to genuine devotion, that it tends to excite and promote it, in

various ways; particularly from the affecting situation of ourselves and fellow-creatures, before our common creator and heavenly parent, in which it places us.

But it is very strange, that a most weighty and powerful consideration and argument should have escaped you, which overturns all your conclusions; namely, that the public worship of God is in itself a duty of rational, social beings, independent of all external command. For wherever a God is recognized, a first cause, and author of all things, a common universal parent, preserver, and benefactor, on whose bounty all equally depend, every moment, for life and every thing, there it is natural for creatures to unite sometimes in praises and thanksgivings to their common protector, to keep up a sense of his constant goodness, and of their obligations and common relation to him. And this has been, more or less, the sentiment and uniform practice of all mankind, who have been in any degree cultivated, in all ages.

Were all men of themselves disposed to piety and virtue, there might be more to say, Synesius, for the solitary, inward devotion of the heart, which you alone recommend. But this is very far from being the fact. Not only those countless multitudes of our species, who are engaged from morning to night in urgent labours for the support of life; and those others, not few in number, who, being exempt from the necessity of bodily toil, and have their minds far more dissipated and vacant of all good, have great need of being reminded of, and put upon, acknowledging the Being that,  
made

made them. but the learned and the philosopher have occasion also for the helps and admonitions to the thought and reverence of God, which are furnished by a frequent periodical call to his public worship.

By this we are all happily drawn away from a too eager pursuit of worldly things, and awakened to attend to that kind invisible Being, whose goodness surrounds us continually, and to serious recollection how we may render ourselves acceptable to him. And it has been remarked, that they who are not accustomed thus to worship God in public, are seldom found to think of him in private, or to render him any homage at all.

God is therefore publicly to be worshipped: to declare to the world our reverence, esteem, and gratitude most due to him; to keep up the knowledge of him in ourselves and others, and to cherish in our breasts that attention to him which is necessary for our present right conduct and comfort, and to qualify us for his favour hereafter.

If you neglect this duty, you go out of the world without bearing your proper testimony to him who made it, and placed you in it; you omit and lose an opportunity of thereby benefitting your fellow-creatures by your example, in a matter of the utmost consequence to them; an opportunity of serving them, for the omission of which you may have cause of most lasting regret in a future world.

Forgive me saying, that the public worship of the

benevolent Author of our beings, and Giver of all good, is a thing so reasonable and self-evident, so satisfactory, and beneficial in so many views, that I know not how to argue with one that does not acknowledge it. I do not know but it is as natural for social intelligent beings, at proper seasons, to seek to unite with each other in prayer and giving thanks to the common Creator, as to worship him alone in private. It is on these accounts perhaps, that we find no particular injunctions concerning it in the earliest times, in our sacred books ; it being presumed to be a dictate of reason, God's natural light given to all, and which all would attend to according to their abilities and opportunities.

When, in process of time, one nation was to be separated from the rest, and put under a peculiar divine protection, we find a public worship of the Creator appointed by an express divine command, and a particular day set apart for it every week. But Moses, and the following historians and prophets, did not think it necessary to give any accounts, except on special occasions, of their observance of this divine command, or of their public devotions on their sabbaths.

If any should object, that our Saviour never gave any special command concerning public worship, and that this implied, that it was not needful to be attended to by his followers ; it should be considered, that it would have been a thing quite superfluous for him to have made any injunctions concerning it, when

when he found his countrymen remarkably punctual and exact in their observance of the divine command given them by Moses, in this respect ; to which he himself also very regularly conformed.

With regard to their synagogue worship, which we are told he never failed to attend every sabbath, although we have no particular description how it was carried on at that time, there is ground to conclude that public prayer made a part of it, as well as the reading and expounding of the scriptures. This we may even gather from the narrative that Justin Martyr gives of the Christians' method of worship, on the weekly day set apart for it in his time, so near that of the apostles ; which was in all probability the very method used by them, and copied from that of the Jewish synagogue ; and which is not very different from that which is at present used in the church of England.

Indeed, the Holy Jesus appears to have omitted no opportunity of shewing his approbation of the public social worship of God ; and his institution of his supper, as a religious ordinance, is an express appointment for it, to those who are persuaded, that it was intended to be of perpetual use to his followers.

The practice also of his apostles gives all the countenance that could be expected to the public social worship of Christians, in the short history which we have of them in the Acts, and in their epistles. St. Paul very particularly informs us, that public prayer made a part of their worship in their religious

assemblies, in (a) one place, where he gives directions to the Christians of Corinth, concerning their management of the gifts of extraordinary powers, which the Almighty bestowed upon them in that first age, that of prayer in particular, to enable them, ignorant and inexperienced as they were, to carry on with effect their public worship, and the instruction of one another in the truths of the gospel. There are few facts, I confess, that seem to be better established, than that it was the mind of Christ, that his followers should unite in social religious worship. And we are not, Synesius, to be diverted from so important a duty by the abuses made of it, but endeavour to correct those abuses.

SYNESIUS.—I frankly own, replied Synesius, that you have brought together more evidence and

(a) 1 Cor. xiv. 15, 16, 17. *What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. Which may be thus expressed in different words. "The sum then is this. All public prayers, preaching, and divine hymns, composed by inspiration, ought to be performed in a language known, or interpreted to the congregation: because otherwise, whatever petitions or thanksgivings any inspired man may offer up to God, the people that know nothing of the language he speaks in can never join with him in them. The man may pray very well as to himself; but the auditory is nothing the better for such prayers."* PYL.

authority,

authority, for it being the will of the Divine Being that mankind should assemble together for his public worship, both from nature's light and revelation, than I had any notion of. And I willingly concede to you, however remiss my own practice has been, that it highly becomes us to join our fellow-creatures in such acts of homage and adoration of our common Creator, as bespeak our sense of his divine perfections, and thankfulness for his continual goodness to us, thereby to fortify these just and right sentiments towards him in ourselves, and to excite and strengthen them in others. But then, you will allow me to say, that this duty may be fulfilled, where these things are understood and declared in *general* terms, though you may not always approve of the particular manner of expression, or of all the modes of address to the Deity which are used. You may satisfy yourself in uniting with such worshippers, out of the general principle of doing homage to the Creator, and encouraging the same disposition in others. And I conceive, that it is on these principles, and with these views, that you may make yourself quite easy, Volusian, in continuing a member of the church of England, and joining with your friends in her worship, even if it were more exceptionable and obnoxious than you deem it to be.

Perfection, added Synesius, is not to be expected in any thing of man's composition. Where a public establishment of religion promotes piety and a good life, we should not be too nice in criticising particular parts and expressions. If there be any thing  
which

which you cannot conscientiously join in and repeat, you have only to adopt what you like, and pass over the rest, leaving it to those who are edified by it. For you are sensible, that they who approve the whole sincerely intend to worship God as well as you, though the sentiments and expressions, which are accommodated to their apprehensions, are not wholly approved by you.

PHOTINUS.—There is a great appearance of candour in your remarks, replied Photinus immediately; but we should take care that our desire to think well of others, and to have them think well of us, does not lead us to undue compliances in religion, and beyond our own sense of things. In lesser matters, wherein we differ, which have no immoral consequences, it would be peevish and hypercritical to refuse to unite with others in their public devotions.

But with respect to the object of worship, there seems to be no latitude. I cannot better express my sense of the matter, than in the words of a dignitary of the church, who, for his valuable writings and excellent character, merits the highest dignities in it.

“ Indeed,” says my author, as I well remember the few strong words he uses upon the occasion, “ where (a) one man thinks it his duty constantly to worship a Being, whom another cannot, with the assent of his conscience, permit himself to worship at all, there seems to be no place for comprehension, or any expe-

(a) Paley's Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy, vol. ii. p. 66, 67.



lient left but a quiet secession. All other differences may be compromised by silence."

Nothing can be more plain and express than the command of the Almighty, as we all seemed to agree the other day, upon this point: "Thou shalt have none other Gods but me." It is difficult to conceive how they who respect this command can allow themselves to worship any other than the single person of Jehovah, the Maker of heaven and earth, who speaks and gives it. And the same remark may be made on that declaration of our Saviour himself, where, citing some other words of Moses, he says; "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." After such a declaration, with what face can any one, who pays any regard to the words of Christ, worship him as God? And it deserves the serious consideration of many Christians, whether, to accord with their practice, as an eminent and grave writer remarks, instead of, "Thou shalt have no other Gods but me;" the first commandment should not have been, "Thou shalt have no other Gods but us three, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

SYNESIUS.—Here Synesius called out to Photinus; I am afraid, my friend, I cannot in return compliment you upon your candour: for it is too plain, that your aim is to depreciate our excellent liturgy, and represent those who give a preference to it as persons void of common sense. But your censures are hasty and undigested. What, if in one or two instances prayer be addressed to Jesus Christ as God, every one must see, that the general turn of the prayers

prayers is to God the Father, through the one mediator, Jesus Christ: and according to all fair and equitable interpretation, the few exceptions are to be construed and explained by the constant tenor of the worship.

PHOTINUS.—To this Photinus replied; I hope, my friend, that I am far from casting any censure on those who entirely approve, in all things, the liturgy of the established church. May that ease and freedom which they enjoy in worshipping God according to their consciences, be continued to them undisturbed!

But then, let others, who are struck with the wrongness of that worship, as being unscriptural and idolatrous, enjoy also their liberty in declaring their opinions, and in warning their friends to keep out of such great errors.

It would be well, Synesius, if it could be as truly said, as I doubt not it is sincerely intended by you, that there are only one or two places in the church-liturgy, where any other God, but the Supreme Father, is addressed in prayer. You must certainly have refrained too long from the public worship, as you confess of your own accord, or you could not have made this remark.

I esteem the liturgy of the church of England a most excellent form of public prayer, uniting a sublime and affecting simplicity with the true spirit of devotion. And I even look upon that part of it, called the Litany, in its frame and design, as constituting a beautiful variety in this worship. But then, in this Litany, which is ordered to be read every Wednesday, and Friday, and every Sunday morning throughout

throughout the year, there is such a variety of beings addressed throughout, so utterly inconsistent with, and contradictory to, the first commandment of Almighty God, that I do not see how the art of man can prove it not to be a breach and violation of that commandment; and every one must judge for himself, whether this be not idolatry.

In the first invocation, how simple is the whole! how right and proper! "O God, the Father of heaven, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners."

But then, where do you find in the scriptures any two other Gods, put upon a level with the one Supreme, as in that which immediately follows?

"O God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners."

"O God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners."

Then again, all the three divine persons are invoked together, and are called by one name, as if calling them so made them one God.

"O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons and one God, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners."

Next follows, what is still more disgusting to the rational and pious mind, that attends to the words of Moses, or the directions of the blessed Jesus himself, concerning the object of divine worship. For that meek and humble Saviour, who was so far from claiming any honour from men, much less divine honours, is himself addressed, throughout the remainder of the

Litany,

Litany, as the Supreme God ; and, strange to say, at the very entrance, you are put upon telling the God you worship, that he was born, that he was circumcised as a Jew, that he sweated blood, and that he died. Custom only, from early youth, could reconcile any to use such gross degrading language, to say nothing more, to the Being they adore as the Supreme God.

Now contrast this complex, strange worship, with that which the holy Jesus used himself, and enjoined us to use. When ye pray, say ; Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name ; thy reign come, as Dr. Campbell has well rendered it ; thy will be done on earth as in heaven, &c.

The like simplicity of address is observable in the few instances of his own prayers which have been preserved. " I thank thee, O Father," says he, in one place, " Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father ; for so it seemed good in thy sight."

As the subject is so important, I hope I shall be excused, my friends, in laying before you an argument against the worship of Christ, furnished by words of his own, which I have not observed to have been insisted upon by any one ; and which, if I mistake not, will be of use to confute some pretences for making him to be God, and worshipping him, that impose upon the unlearned, and have more weight than they ought to have with many worthy persons.

They are almost the very last words of his, which  
are

are recorded; when, after commissioning his disciples to go and carry the gospel to all nations, he adds; "teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you."

If then, to apply this to our present case, I want to be resolved on this great point, who is the God I am to worship, and to whom I am to offer my prayers; I am to examine what account the evangelists and apostles give of the matter, and the directions of their great master concerning it. Do they tell us that Jesus at any time gave orders for any new God to be worshipped, himself, or the Holy Ghost, different from what the Jews had been accustomed to worship before? No such thing can be found, nor is even pretended; but inferences have been made, and conclusions drawn, from certain words uttered by Christ, or by his apostles concerning him, that he was God, and to be worshipped; and so concerning the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit being equally God, and to be worshipped. As if so momentous a point, which regards the very Being we are to worship, and the introduction of two new Gods, additional to Jehovah, the Supreme Father, were a matter to be left to doubtful and precarious inferences, and not made the subject of an express and positive command, which could not be misunderstood by the meanest capacity; and which the directions of Christ here authorize us to expect.

To apply this in another case,

The early fathers, or first Christian writers, are supposed by some to have taught that Jesus was God,

and to be worshipped; or, that they spoke of him in such terms as implied his deity and worship.

If we grant this, which however may be justly questioned, and is denied, with respect to the very earliest of these fathers; are we to go to them to learn who Christ was; to men, who notoriously from the very first corrupted the gospel with heathen mixtures? No: our Saviour here tells us, that we are to be governed only by what he himself taught, and commanded. And his apostles mention no such command being delivered by their master, of considering him as God, and worshipping him; but the contrary.

To give one more instance of the usefulness of our divine master's directions in this respect. Great stress is laid upon the examination of some Christians before Pliny the younger, the heathen governor of Bithynia, who made confession before him; "that they were (a) wont to meet together before day, and sing hymns to Christ, as to a god."

This might mean only the singing hymns in honour of Christ, which Pliny might take, according to his heathen notions, to be the considering of him as a god, like the human gods that he himself worshipped.

But understand it as you will; can this be an authority for worshipping Christ as God, when the

(a) —quod essent soliti stato die ante lucem convenire, carmenque Christo quasi deo dicere secum invicem.

Plin. Ep. p. 724.

apostles

apostles of Christ are not only silent about any such command being given by him ; but teach, that the Father only is God, and to be worshipped ?

I must beg your indulgence in suggesting another thought, which occurs to me on this matter, proceeds Photinus, as it may well put us all upon better considering the grounds of our devotional practice, than we are wont to do.

Should our Lord, at the last day, enter into any remonstrance with those who deified and worshipped him in their life-time, it might perhaps be in some such form as this : “ Mistaken men, how came ye to take me to be God, and to worship and pray to me ? Had this been right in any manner whatsoever, assuredly I should have told it you directly, and not have left a thing of such infinite consequence in the least uncertainty. My apostles, who were best acquainted with me, and with what I taught, have never recorded that I declared myself God ; but that I always spoke of myself as a creature of God, his beloved child and servant.

“ What if I said, in one place, that all men should honour me as they honoured the Father ? I in the very same breath spoke of myself as sent by him, and therefore could claim no other honour but the respect and obedience due to a messenger of God.

“ If I said ; all power is given unto me in heaven and earth ? By saying it was given, I shewed from whom I was to receive it, and upon whom I was to depend for it ; and therefore was far from being God on that account.

“ If my apostle Paul, citing the scriptures as speaking of me, introduced these words ; Let all the angels of God worship him ? He, or the prophet who first used the words, could intend only such worship as was due to one so highly favoured of God.”

VOLUSIAN.—Here Volusian interrupted Photinus, apparently much agitated, having been extremely attentive, but never spoken during this day’s conference. It is enough, cries he to Photinus, you need not go any farther. The evidence afforded by the holy Jesus himself is so strong, the arguments so convincing, that men have only to open their eyes to see the deplorable state of the whole Christian world, at this period of the world, in worshipping him, the creature equally with the Creator, who is God alone blessed for ever. I am, however, highly obliged to Synesius, whether he intended it in kindness to me, or for his own satisfaction, for producing the most powerful arguments the case would allow, to reconcile persons to remain members of the established church, whatever be their objections to its doctrines and worship. For the frank and good-tempered enquiry and discussion, to which his arguments have given rise, hath convinced me, if I was not sufficiently convinced before, that I can no longer, with a quiet mind, continue to frequent the worship of the church of England, to which I have hitherto all my life belonged. I cannot say, or seem to say, one thing with my mouth, to the all-seeing God, respecting himself, whilst my heart and better knowledge



ledge mean another. I cannot invoke God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, as each of them Gods, while I believe them no Gods at all, but the Father to be the only true God, in the express language and declaration of Jesus himself. But I am at a loss what to do : and if the public worship of Almighty God be a duty, of which I have no doubt, what methods to take, or where to turn myself.

The hour, however, reminds me of releasing my friends from a conversation, which, though kindly intended towards me, must be anxious and troublesome to them. But I hope, that by their assistance, for one day more, the dark clouds that hang over my mind will disperse, and day-light and peace appear.

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## P O S T S C R I P T.

*Giving an account of the causes of the great corruption of the Gospel, in making Christ the Supreme God, and the reason of its long continuance.*

I AM glad that you are pleased with the character which I gave, in answer to your enquiry, of Photinus, Bishop of Sirmium, in the fourth century; and with the short account that came along with it, of Unitarian Christians, before and after his time.

But you are disturbed at the thought of the doctrine of more divine persons, more gods, than one, making its appearance so very early in the Christian church, being so directly contrary, as you are persuaded, to the teachings of Jesus Christ: and you wish I would in a few words tell you how to reply to those, who maintain, that what was of such antiquity, and so generally received, and has lasted so long, being at present the doctrine of the whole Christian world, must have been true, and have come from the apostles themselves.

Unquestionably, all this appears very specious and imposing; and it is not surprising that those, who are little acquainted with the history of the early Christians, are dazzled by it: but the following statement of facts, which may be depended upon, will very easily shew, that it is fallacious and groundless. For it is, in the first place, far from being exact, to say, that the doctrine of more divine persons, more gods than one, was embraced by any Christians in the time of the apostles. The defection was gradual. The first followers of Christ were all Jews, *viz.* the apostles, with others mentioned in the New Testament; who adhered strictly to the worship of the God of their fathers, the God who made the world, and all things in it; honouring Jesus Christ, who was born among them, as his extraordinary prophet and messenger, especially promised to their nation, but who was also to be the Saviour and divine instructor of all mankind; and who, after a life of labour and painful exertion to bring men to virtue and immortal happiness, confirmed the truth of his divine mission, by yielding himself up to the torturing and infamous death of the cross, rather than save his life by denying it.

But the false philosophy of some learned men, who embraced Christianity in the time of the apostles, would not suffer them to admit such a degrading idea of the divine head of their new religion, that he should have been thus exposed to pain and death; although it be a circumstance

cumstance that continually presents itself in the history of the evangelists. Thinking these last to be unlearned men, they probably made light of their testimony on this point, and scrupled not to add, of their own authority, that Christ had existed, how long they did not define, before he came upon earth; asserting also at the same time, that he had only the appearance of a man, liable to sufferings and death; but was not so in reality. There is scarce a fact in all antiquity better attested, than that there were Christians of this cast in the apostles' days, and that St. John wrote against them, in his epistles. Most probably his arguments, from his own personal knowledge, and his warm reproofs, put an end to them, and their unsupported fancies concerning Christ, for we hear little more of them afterwards. These were, however, immediately succeeded by other philosophic Christians; one of whom, Justin the martyr, as he was called, who almost touched upon the times of the apostle John, brought in his doctrine of Platonism, and grafted it upon the gospel, boldly asserting, that Christ was an inferior god, such as was taught by Plato's philosophy, subordinate to the Supreme Being; and this he imagined he found also in the Bible, and used several of the arguments for it, the futility of which Volusian so well exposed, in our second day's conversation, which you have received. And from the time of Justin, to the present hour, those who have stood up for the pre-existence, or the divinity of Jesus Christ, have done little else but copy after, and retail the arguments of this truly pious, but much mistaken ancient.

I shall pass over in silence the complicated idolatry into which the whole Christian world fell by degrees after this, and in which it remained overwhelmed and buried for many long ages, till the Reformation.

At that memorable period, the idolatrous worship of images and saints, which had lasted so long, was abolished  
by

by the generality of Protestants, who separated from the church of Rome. Unfortunately, however, the principal reformers in different countries, Luther, Melancthon, Zuinglius, Calvin, and the English and Scotch divines, did not suffer themselves to enquire, whether there were not also other false objects of worship retained by them, equally prohibited by the divine command; but, without examination, acquiesced in the doctrine of the trinity, as if it had immediately come down to them from heaven, instead of being fabricated, as it truly was, by early heathen Christians, and schoolmen; and formed their new articles and confessions of faith upon it. It still continued to be a crime of the deepest dye to call it in question, and they who persisted in denying Jesus, and the Holy Ghost to be gods equal to the Father, were not suffered to live, but punished with the most dreadful deaths.

But many of lower rank, and of good sense, being now at liberty to read the scriptures, to which they are recorded to have turned themselves with uncommon eagerness and delight, and finding no trinity there, and that the holy Jesus was not God, nor to be worshipped, but the Father only; they had the noble zeal and courage publicly to declare and inculcate this great truth, in various countries, and particularly in our own; for which they were without mercy burnt alive. And we gather from that honest historian, (a) Strype, that this extreme severity probably put a stop to the progress of this doctrine, which was spreading rapidly at that time, in the year 1550.

(a) "*Arianism* now shewed itself so openly, and was in such danger of spreading farther, that it was thought necessary to suppress it, by using more rugged methods than seemed agreeable to the merciful principles of the professors of the gospel."

Strype's Ecclesiastical Memoirs, Vol. ii. p. 214.

Arianism was then a general name for every opinion that opposed the divinity of Christ.

Protestants

Protestants now, like the Papists, persecuted those who could not believe Christ to be God, with unrelenting cruelty. Queen Elizabeth, to her everlasting disgrace, lighted again the fires in Smithfield, to burn some unhappy persons, who, among other opinions, did not allow Jesus to be the supreme God. Better could not be expected from her narrow-minded successor, who caused Edward Wightman, of Burton upon Trent, to be burnt alive at Coventry, and (a) Bartholomew Legatt in West-Smithfield; both of them strict Unitarians. The wickedness that was supposed to be in his opinions was all that was alleged against the former: the latter is mentioned by his adversaries as pious, learned, and in all respects an excellent character.

In the next reign, the same opinions were adopted, purely from reading the Bible, by Mr. John Biddle, the Socinian, as he is commonly stiled, by way of reproach. For avowing these, and particularly for denying Jesus to be the Most High God, he was accused, and adjudged to be burnt alive, by the Presbyterian party; but Cromwell, who

(a) The reader will perhaps be curious to see the form of the king's warrant for burning Legatt: the latter part of which is as follows;

“ Whereas the Holy Mother Church hath not further to do and to prosecute on this part; the same reverend Father hath left the aforesaid Bartholomew Legatt as a blasphemous Heretick to our secular power, to be punished with condign punishment, as by the Letters Patent of the same reverend Father in Christ the Bishop of London in this behalf above made, hath been certified unto us in our Chancery. We, therefore, as a zealot of Justice, and a Defender of the Catholick Faith, and willing to maintain and defend the Holy Church, and the Rights and Liberties of the same, and the Catholick Faith: And such Heresies and Errors every where what in us lieth, to root out and extirpate, and to punish with condign punishment: such Hereticks so convicted, and deeming

who better understood (a) the rights of conscience, interposed to save him out of their hands. He was Master of Arts in the university of Oxford, and a great honour to it, by his learning and singular virtues, as well as courage in the cause of divine truth. And the day will come, may it not be very remote! when that noble seminary, sensible of the peerless unrivalled majesty of the One God and Father of all, for which this excellent person was at last condemned to die in a dungeon, shall erect a monument of honour to his name.

In the two following reigns, the noble fruits appeared of that free enquiry into the scriptures, which many had been emboldened to make, during the struggles for liberty, and whilst the ecclesiastical power was kept under. Some of the most eminent divines, and dignitaries of the church of England, did not think themselves discredited by living in

deeming that such an Heretick in form aforesaid, convicted and condemned according to the laws and customs of this our kingdom of England in this part accustomed, ought to be burned with fire: We do command you, that the said Bartholomew Legatt, being in your custody, you do commit publicly to the fire, before the people, in a public and open place in West-Smithfield, for the cause aforesaid; and that you cause the said Bartholomew Legatt to be really burnt in the same fire, in detestation of the said crime, for the manifest example of other Christians, lest they slide into the same fault, and that this in no wise you omit, under the peril that shall follow thereon. Witness &c." A narration of the burning of Bartholomew Legatt, &c. in Truth brought to Light, 1692.

(a) It was one of the capital articles of the Protector's government, which redounds highly to his honour; Art. 37. *That such as profess faith in God by Jesus Christ, though differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship, or discipline publicly held forth, shall not be restrained from, but protected in the profession of the faith and exercise of their religion, &c.* Art. 38. *That all laws, statutes, ordinances, &c. to the contrary of the aforesaid liberty, shall be esteemed as null and void."*

The law for burning Hereticks was repealed in 1676.

friendship

friendship with professed Socinians, and some embraced their sentiments. By these, and some laymen of note, among whom Mr. Locke is named, and under the patronage of Mr. Firmin, a citizen of London, never to be mentioned but in terms of the highest honour, were published those called UNITARIAN TRACTS; which might have rendered all subsequent writings in the same cause unnecessary, had a proper attention been paid to them. Their authors were all members of the church of England: and as there were many of them persons of great worth and eminence, much might have been expected from their joint endeavours in promoting the proper unity of the Divine Being. But all came to nothing, or rather no immediate good effect followed; which was probably owing to their conformity to the trinitarian worship of the church, by which they confuted their own arguments for the necessity of a reformation in it. This was seen at last, and owned by some of them.

The Act of Toleration brought no relief to the conscientious worshipper of the one true God, the Father, to the exclusion of Jesus Christ or any other person as God along with him. Oppugners of the trinity are expressly excepted out of that Act.

And by the Act of the 9th and 10th of William III. persons educated in, or who have professed the Christian religion within this realm, by writing, preaching, teaching, or advised speaking, denying any one of the persons of the holy trinity to be God—such persons, upon conviction, for the first offence, “shall be adjudged incapable and disabled in law, to all intents and purposes whatsoever, to have or enjoy any office or offices, employment or employments, ecclesiastical, civil, or military, or any part of them, or any profit or advantage appertaining to them or any of them; and for the second offence shall be disabled to sue in any court, to be guardian of any child, or executor

executor or administrator to any person, or capable of any legacy or deed of gift, or to bear any office or benefice for ever, within this realm, and shall suffer imprisonment for the space of three years."

From this brief historical deduction, Victorin, you perceive, that this doctrine of more divine persons, more gods than one, first imported into the religion of Christ by heathen converts, has kept its ground to this day, not by any solid arguments taken from the scriptures, but by the prevention of all free examination into them, whereby error might be detected; it having been for many ages, and still to this hour being; unsafe and dangerous, by the laws of the civil power in every Christian country, to profess or publish any doctrine concerning Christ, or the Holy Ghost, contrary to that established by the state. But now that men have not been afraid to publish what appears to them to be the truth on this subject, notwithstanding unreasonable and unrighteous laws to the contrary, and are more and more encouraged to it by a general tacit condemnation of such laws; this polytheistical doctrine is falling into discredit; and the doctrine of the divine unity is making its way in all countries, especially in our own.

But I wish you may not think that I have detained you too long from seeing what was the issue of Volusian's anxieties, in which the last day's conversation left him. I proceed therefore with what followed.



## THE FIFTH DAY.

*Volusian sees how easily, and with what honour and credit, the service of the church of England may be reformed, with respect to the object of divine worship, in which it is now sadly erroneous.*

AFTER the conversation of the former day, Volusian was observed to be extremely pensive, and not to mix with his friends on the several topics that were introduced, in that frank, unreserved manner that was usual with him: which was the more remarkable, as he was wont to say, that a man ought not to go into company with any thing about him, that might interrupt the hilarity of those he associated with.

It was afterwards found to be caused by an anxiety, which he could not possibly shake off, how to conduct himself on the recent discovery that he had made, that the holy Jesus, whom he had hitherto considered as the supreme God, and object of worship, was no more than the favoured creature and messenger of the most high God to man: whether he was to go on notwithstanding to attend the public worship of one, who, he was persuaded, was not God; or what to do.

In a few days, however, the gloom was dissipated, and he appeared even more cheerful and vacant than he had been for some time. But as the same thoughts were still uppermost, the first convenient opportunity that he could find, when the company were at leisure, and assembled together, without any preface, and with an

easy, serene countenance, he entered upon the subject all at once.

**VOLUSIAN.**—You will be pleased, my friends, to hear, that I never felt myself happier than in this light of divine truth, which has lately broken in upon my mind, by which I can see my way clearly before me, upon the most important of all subjects, with respect to the Being who made me, and whom it is my first duty and happiness to adore.

To me indeed it now appears a truth so plain and demonstrable, that the single person of Jehovah, the maker of heaven and earth, is God alone, and Jesus Christ only his highly favoured messenger and prophet; that it needs but to be laid before all, even those of the lowest understanding, in that simple manner in which it has impressed me, and all will be brought to acknowledge it. I cannot therefore but look forward with satisfaction to the day, at no great distance, I hope, when the public sentiment will be changed, and every one will be eager to call for a corresponding change of our public forms of worship in this respect, being not able any longer to take a part in, and countenance, what will appear to them, as it now does to me, an idolatrous service.

**MARCELLINUS.**—How delightful is truth! says Marcellinus, pleased with such an opening; what peace and security is there in the possession of it! especially in what relates to the knowledge of the great parent of all things! It is plain that Volusian would not exchange its charms, and the sober joy he now feels, for all that the universe can bestow. And he has no regrets, whatever be the cast or colour of his future life here, unless that he did not sooner become acquainted with it. I wonder  
not,

not, my welcome friend and guest, that you are so deeply penetrated with the strong and invincible evidence, that has so lately presented itself to your inquiring mind, from the scriptures. "*Quod deus est singularis et unus,*" as Lactantius often expresses himself; "that God is one single person." If the judgment were not previously warped and perverted, by the conceits and subtleties of theologians, almost literally taken in with our mother's milk; this strict unity of God, without a peer or rival, would be as evident to every rational mind, as the sun in the unclouded firmament at noon day, to one who has the use of the organs of sight.

But although it very naturally strikes you, Volusian, who have so recently been brought to see the light of this grand truth, that others must be equally affected with it, you must be sensible, from a little reflection on your own former state, and that of many of your friends at present, that such a change must be a work of time. From indolence, and a variety of motives, many are wholly indifferent to a question, which is of the utmost importance to them; who is God, their maker? A greater number, from education, without inquiry, believe, that there are three divine persons, whom they are equally, and severally bound to worship, and nevertheless can maintain, that they are but one God: so far happy in the delusion, in never reflecting upon the objects of their devotion, as the thought would necessarily overwhelm their minds with inextricable confusion about them, what to do with so many of them. And yet it is undoubted, that a truth so momentous as that of the divine unity, so plainly inscribed in the book of nature, but

legible in every page of divine revelation, as you, Volusian, have shewn, if placed before creatures capable of any degree of serious moral reflection, must move them, and force their attention.

You would however have had better grounds for pleasing yourself with the prospect if this much-desired change take place in the public worship of the church, if you had known any thing of an extraordinary advancement made towards it, from a very important quarter in the church itself. But indeed you have been so averse to every thing of this kind, Volusian, that your friends have always waved speaking on the subject, when you have been with them, to avoid giving uneasiness.

VOLUSIAN.—I own, I do not wonder at this procedure of your's, says Volusian, though I am ashamed of myself now for having given occasion for it, and am truly sensible of the loss I have sustained by it.

MARCELLINUS.—You will perceive, proceeded Marcellinus, not having adverted to what Volusian was saying; to what a degree your prejudices in favour of the doctrines of the establishment have shut up your mind from the knowledge of what was doing by churchmen themselves, in your ignorance of the fact of great notoriety, to which I allude; and which one wonders any intelligent member of the church of England should be unacquainted with.

VOLUSIAN.—Upon Marcellinus thus expatiating, without coming directly to the point, Volusian grew not a little impatient, and could not help saying; My good friends all, and particularly Marcellinus! I beg pardon  
for

for the trouble you have formerly had with such an obstinate companion ; but I assure you, that you may now tell me any thing, because it will not be lost or unheeded, and will sooth my mind much in its present state.

MARCELLINUS.—What I have to mention, replies Marcellinus, and which I shall be no less glad to communicate than you to hear, my worthy friend, relates to one of the greatest ornaments of the church of England, whether you regard him as a scholar, philosopher, divine, or as a truly good man, which is beyond them all ; none other than Dr. Clarke, the celebrated Rector of St. James's, Westminster.

This eminent person was under very extraordinary convictions of the necessity of reforming the liturgy of the church ; and for some years before his death, had employed himself, at his leisure hours, in making amendments in it throughout. The principal and most striking alterations made and proposed by him, were in the devotional parts, with respect to the object of worship.

And here he took the liberty of blotting out all those passages in which the Son, or the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit, are called God, or divine worship ascribed to either of them ; retaining only those prayers and invocations which were addressed to the one true God, and Father of all.

This was done by him, when his judgment and faculties were in their full vigour, having been finished just before he was unexpectedly taken off by a fever, in his 54th year, a°. 1729.

This invaluable labour (a) of his father's, his worthy son, Mr. Clarke, presented to the British Museum, about twenty years ago ; that it might be deposited, and preserved among the most precious things of the nation (b). And there it is now to be seen by you, Volusian, or by any other person.

I cannot, however, finish what I have to say on this invaluable deposit, without adding, that there is in the

(c) The first and the only public notice, as far as I can learn, that was given of this attempt of this eminent person, towards a reformation of the public service, was a few years after his death, in "Memoirs of the Life and Sentiments of the Rev. Dr. Samuel Clarke," by one who lived on very intimate terms with him, that famous sufferer for the doctrine of the Divine Unity, Mr. Emlyn. His words are ; "He (Dr. Clarke) once shewed me that he had been making some emendations in his *Common-prayer* book ; and the very last time, I think, I ever saw him, (the *March* before he died) and in some of our last discourse at parting, he asked me, if he had shewn me what he had been doing in his *Common-prayer*. I said I had just seen it once ; he added, that *it should not be lost*. With what design or view he had done it, he never said to me. I suppose, by something I cast my eye upon, that one design was to correct some improper expressions, the meaning whereof might be obscure, and the phrase harsh and uncouth, even where no points of doctrine were concerned. But I hardly supposed he ever finished the work, being soon after taken away from us." Emlyn's works, Vol II. p. 499. It appears, from Mr. Emlyn's being a stranger to it, that not many of Dr. Clarke's friends were apprized of the extent of his difficulties, with regard to the worship of the church he belonged to ; or how anxious he must have been for a reformation in that respect.

(d) Dr. Clarke's own title is, "Amendments, humbly proposed to the consideration of those in authority, of the Book of Common-prayer, &c."

library

library here, an extract of a letter from Archbishop Herring to Dr. Jortin, after the Archbishop had gotten a sight of this work of Dr. Clarke's. And his character of it, to so estimable a person, and fine a scholar, as Dr. Jortin, well marks the high opinion both of them had of these emendations of Dr. Clarke, and the concern it gave the Archbishop, that the temper of the nation would not permit them to be adopted; although it might have been wished, that he had taken some way to express these sentiments before the public, as well as to his friend in private, to whom he thus writes :

“CROYDON, AUG. 7, 1753.

(a) “ I have seen Dr. Clarke's Common-Prayer Book. I have read it; have approved the temper, and wisdom of it. But into what times are we fallen, after so much light, and so much appearance of moderation, that one can only wish for the success of truth! The world will not bear it.”

(a) See New Review, Vol. I. p. 241. by Henry Maty, A. M. learned, ingenious, and of most singular integrity. He was a confessor of the truth of the Divine Unity; suffering the loss of many things for it. The admission of the Amendments of the Liturgy, proposed by Dr. Clarke, would have kept him in his station in the church.

To these testimonies of approbation of Dr. Clarke's reformed liturgy, may be added that of another prelate, more lately gone off this mortal stage, the learned, gentle and humane Dr. Law, Bishop of Carlisle; than whom no one ever had a mind more open to truth, or was more communicative of it. Very signal proofs might be produced, how joyful an event it would have been to him, if he could have seen Dr. Clarke's reformation of the Liturgy adopted throughout the nation.

VOLUSIAN.

**VOLUSIAN.**—Volusian had listened with great attention, and pleasure in his countenance, whilst Marcellinus was speaking; and immediately applying himself to him, I am extremely obliged to you, says he, for this curious history of a most important fact indeed, which I assure you is perfectly new to me, and I believe to the far greater part of the members of the established church. For so wrapt up are we in the notion of every thing being most perfect in it, especially with regard to its worship, that we cannot bear to hear, or read of any of the least alterations in it, no not even in the uncharitable creed, wrongly it seems ascribed to St. Athanasius, and composed above a hundred years after he was in his grave. But though I was taught from my youth, that Dr. Clarke was not quite sound in some of his opinions, I was taught at the same time to think with reverence of his writings and character in general. And I should be highly obliged to you, Marcellinus, if you could favour me with any general idea of the alterations he has proposed, with respect to the object of divine worship, in his amendments of the book of Common-prayer, which you speak of.

**MARCELLINUS.**—I am happy, says Marcellinus, that I have it in my power to gratify you. I have a book here, published some years since, in which all the alterations you wish to see are transcribed, in their regular order, from Dr. Clarke's manuscript; and with the leave of the company, I will read them over to you. Upon which they all nodded their assent; and  
Marcellinus,



Marcellinus, taking the book off a shelf that was near him, read as follows (a) ;

*A list of exceptionable parts of the Liturgy, with respect to the object of worship; all of which, are either quite struck out, or changed, by Dr. Clarke.*

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost : As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

Struck out and changed, wherever it is ordered to be read.

*Te Deum.*

Thou art the king of glory, O Christ.

Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.

When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man, thou didst not abhor the virgin's womb.

When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

Thou sittest at the right hand of God in the glory of the Father.

We believe that thou shalt come to be our judge.

We therefore pray thee help thy servants, whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.

Make them to be numbered with thy saints in glory everlasting.

Changed ; and the whole directed to God, and not to Christ.

(a) The Apology—on resigning the vicarage of Catterick, 185, &c. Lord

Lord have mercy upon us.  
 Christ have mercy upon us.  
 Lord have mercy upon us.

} Quite struck out,  
 here and every  
 where.

*Prayer of St. Chrysostom.*

—When two or three are gathered to-  
 gether in *thy* name.

} Changed to *thy*  
*Son's name.*

*The Creed of St. Athanasius.*

Struck out.

*Litany.*

O God the Son, redeemer of the  
 world, have mercy upon us, miserable  
 sinners.

O God the Holy Ghost, proceeding  
 from the Father and the Son, have mercy  
 upon us, miserable sinners.

O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity,  
 Three persons and one God, have mercy  
 upon us, miserable sinners.

—whom thou hast redeemed with thy  
 most precious blood.

} Changed; and  
 the whole direct-  
 ed to God.

By the mystery of thy holy incarna-  
 tion, by thy holy nativity and circumci-  
 sion; by thy baptism, fasting, and temp-  
 tation.

By thine agony and bloody sweat; by  
 thy cross and passion; by thy precious  
 death and burial; by thy glorious resur-  
 rection and ascension; and by the com-  
 ing of the Holy Ghost.

*Litany*

*Litany continued.*

Son of God, we beseech thee to hear  
us.

*Son of God we beseech thee to hear  
us.*

O Lamb of God, that takest away  
the sins of the world,

*Grant us thy peace.*

O Lamb of God, that takest away  
the sins of the world,

*Have mercy upon us.*

O Christ hear us.

*O Christ hear us.*

Lord have mercy upon us.

*Lord have mercy upon us.*

Christ have mercy upon us.

*Christ have mercy upon us.*

Lord have mercy upon us.

*Lord have mercy upon us.*

From our enemies defend us, O Christ.

O Son of David, have mercy upon us.

Both now and ever vouchsafe to hear  
us, O Christ.

Graciously hear us, O Christ; graci-  
ously hear us, O Lord Christ.

The whole of  
this quite struck  
out.

Changed and di-  
rected to God.

Struck out.

*Prayer*

*Prayer in time of dearth and famine:*

—to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever.

} Struck out here, and every where throughout the liturgy,

*Collects.**First Sunday in Advent.*

—who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever.

} Changed here, and in all other places.

*Third Sunday in Advent.*

O Lord Jesu Christ, who, at thy first coming, &c.

} Changed, and addressed to God.

*Fourth Sunday in Advent.*

Changed.

*Christmas-Day.*

—who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end.

} Changed here, and every where.

*St. Stephen's Day.*

—who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus—

} Changed, and directed to God.

*Trinity Sunday.*

Changed.

*Nicene Creed.*

Struck out.

*Exhortation*

*Exhortation to the Communion.*

—above all, we must give most humble and hearty thanks to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, for the redemption of the world by the death and passion of our Saviour Christ, both God and man.—

Changed, and directed to God.

To him, therefore, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, let us give continual thanks.

*Preface upon the feast of Trinity.*

Struck out.

*Prayer after the Communion.*

— by whom, and with whom, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, all honour and glory be unto thee, O Father.

Changed.

O Lord, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world; have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us.

Changed entirely, and addressed only to God.

—For thou only art Holy, thou only art the Lord, thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art the Most High in the glory of God the Father.

*Public Baptism of Infants.*

—Ye have prayed, that our Lord Jesus Christ would vouchsafe to receive him, to release him of his sins, to sanctify him with the Holy Ghost, to give him the kingdom of heaven and everlasting life—Ye have heard also, that our Lord Jesus hath promised in his gospel to grant all these things.

Changed here,  
and also in the  
baptism of  
such as are of  
riper years.

*Catechism.*

What dost thou chiefly learn in these articles of the belief?

First, I learn to believe in God the Father, who hath made me and all the world.

Secondly, in God the Son, who hath redeemed me and all mankind.

Thirdly, in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifies me, and all the elect people of God.

Struck out.

*Matrimony.*

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, bless, preserve, and keep you.

Changed.

*Visitation*

*Visitation of the Sick.**Absolution.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath  
 left power to his church to absolve all  
 sinners, who truly repent and believe in  
 him, of his great mercy forgive thee  
 thine offences ; and, by his authority  
 committed to me, I absolveth ee from  
 all thy sins, in the name of the Father,  
 and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Quite struck  
 out.

**VOLUSIAN.**—Marcellinus having finished, there was a deep silence ; and after a short space, Volusian, with an air of concern and apparent astonishment, cried out ; My friends, I can hardly credit my own ears, in what they have just now conveyed to me, which yet I have heard a thousand and a thousand times, without any such emotion. But I suppose, that the present state of my mind, added to the several addresses to, and invocations of Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Ghost, throughout the Liturgy, being brought together under one point of view, makes me so affected with their strange, heathen appearance. Could any one ever imagine, that the worship of such a multiplicity of objects, could belong to those who have the sacred writings of the Old and New Testament for their rule, and the examples of Moses and the prophets, of Jesus Christ and his apostles, for their guide,

guide, in worshipping Jehovah, the single parent of the universe, and no other besides him? It is not to be wondered at, that there are such complaints of divine service being neglected, and our churches deserted. The ingenious lady, Miss H——h M——e, or whoever is the author of “The Religion of the Fashionable World,” said to have been overlooked by a prelate high upon the bench; may compose, and publish ever so many pious and pathetic exhortations to the observance of the sabbath, and an attendance on the public established worship: but all will be in vain, whilst the church’s service remains unaltered. The rational mind, that looks up only to nature’s God, will turn away from such polytheistic worship; and still more, where enlightened by the precept and example of inspired teachers and prophets, and of the holy Jesus above all.

But I am wholly at a loss to account, how it was possible for so good a man as Dr. Clarke, after striking out, and condemning all these devotional addresses in the Liturgy, offered to Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, still to continue, not only to join in the worship he so deliberately disapproved, but to take an active part in it. Where is virtue; where is integrity; if such things are right, and to be defended, and persisted in?

MARCELLINUS.—I did indeed expect, replies Marcellinus, that your upright soul would be scandalized at the appearance of such an inconsistent practice. But if it may not be wholly justified, many things



things may be alleged to abate so severe a censure of it.

We who come, after it has been so fully demonstrated, that Christ, and the Holy Spirit, so far from being objects of worship, equal to the Supreme Father, are not Gods, or to be worshipped at all, do not sufficiently consider, that such persons as Dr. Clarke, who first saw these things to be wrong, were far from having the same impressions of them, and might reconcile themselves to continue in the church, and join in the offering up of prayers which they disapproved, from various motives ; a persuasion that they could not do so much good in any other situation, and a design to pave the way for, and gradually to bring about, the desired reformation. The not attending to these circumstances makes us imagine, that they had the same idea of the wrongness of such worship as we now have, and that they went as directly against their consciences, in their conformity to it, as we should do. But it was far otherwise. It certainly did not appear to Dr. Clarke, that he was an idolater (a), in worshipping

(a) Neither did it appear to the famous F. Socinus, that he was an idolater in worshipping Jesus Christ; who not only held it right to worship and pray to him, but carried his zeal for it so far, as to condemn those who could not come into his opinions, and worship Christ as he did.

But this full persuasion and confidence of the rightness of his opinions in Socinus, did not make him the less an idolater, or acquit him of a violation of the first divine command, in worshipping

ping Jesus Christ as God, of which however you, Volusian, are fully, and upon just grounds convinced. We do not find that his friend, Sir Isaac Newton, refrained from the established worship; although he probably went farther than Dr. Clarke, in holding Christ to have been only a human creature, invested with extraordinary powers, and a mission from God. Even Mr. Whiston, for a long time, made himself easy with publicly declaring, that although he attended the Athanasian worship of the church, he did not join in those parts of it, but passed them over, as things with which he had no concern. At last, however, he was sensible that there was no way of making conscience quiet, but by a reformation of the Liturgy itself. As Dr. Clarke died somewhat suddenly, and unexpectedly by himself, as well as his friends; when he seems barely to have finished his improvements of the Liturgy, we know not what steps he might have taken afterwards to reduce them to practice. It appears, from that diligent exactness with which he marked every address, and even every single word and phrase that infringed upon the Divine Unity, how much he had at heart God's true worship, that of the single person of the Father only; and how exceedingly he must have been affected with the wide departure of the church of England from it.

ping and paying divine honours to another person besides Jehovah, the Supreme God.

What a lesson this, to teach us all candour and moderation in our censures of others!

God

God only knows the hearts of men ; what influences they are under, and what are their designs. But from these and other circumstances, relating to Dr. Clarke, there is nothing improbable in supposing, that had his life been prolonged, he would have made some attempt to have procured an exclusion from the Liturgy of the worship of all other persons, except the Father, the one only true God. And had he been endued with courage to exert himself to bring about such a reformation, in the article of divine worship, who can say he would not have proposed it ? there is no small ground of presumption to believe, that he would therein have had the countenance of his late Majesty George II. ; but most assuredly of his consort, Queen Caroline ; who was entirely in Dr. Clarke's sentiments (*a*), with respect to the Athanasian Trinity and worship. One circumstance also is reported on good authority, that by both their Majesties he was so highly esteemed, that had he lived, he would have been raised to the bench of bishops, and perhaps the see of Canterbury might have been offered to him (*b*).

(*a*) Since the writing of the above, I have been informed by a friend, well acquainted with Dr. Clarke's son, and who learned from him, that Queen Caroline had a copy of the " Amendments of the book of Common-prayer, &c. in her hands, at the time of Dr. Clarke's death ; and that she afterwards returned the copy back to the family.

(*b*) Memoirs of the life of Dr. Samuel Clarke. Emlyn's works, vol. ii, p. 492.

And

And it is to be observed, that this was after the Doctor's sentiments concerning the Trinity had been many years published, and also opposed, and condemned in print, by the famous Dr. Waterland, and others; of which things those who had thoughts of placing him in such a high situation could not be ignorant.

And although Dr. Clarke might have been opposed in the introduction of such a plan of reforming the Liturgy, by one party in the church, he would have been greatly supported by others: perhaps by a majority, when it was conjectured, that the government in any degree favoured him. Besides, it is well known that many, particularly of the learned among the clergy, were already come over to embrace his opinions. Few of his rank have been equally lamented at their death, by the wise and good through the nation. A greater proof cannot be given, than presents itself in the amiable Bishop Rundle's letters, written at the time, to Mrs. Sandys, very lately published.

And now I am mentioning the probability of Dr. Clarke's reformed Common-prayer Book meeting with many admirers, approvers, and open abettors, had it been made public, and proposed to be used in his life-time, you will excuse my relating a trifling anecdote, not wholly out of season I would hope, and which you may smile at if you please; *viz.* that when this same reformed Liturgy was first made use of at the chapel in Essex-street, in the Spring, 1774,  
a generous

a generous patron and encourager of the design, and who constantly frequented the worship, was so struck with its scriptural simplicity, that in the warmth of his zeal and approbation, he would often say ; that in seven year's time it would be adopted at St. James's.

This prediction indeed has not yet been verified ; but I believe, that if it could be fairly represented to a great personage, on what solid grounds of scripture the alterations, with respect to the object of worship, have been made ; and that they originated with so excellent a person as Dr. Clarke, formerly Rector of St. James's, Westminster, and have been approved by learned and good men, and some of the first rank on the episcopal bench, and of the fairest characters in the establishment ; he would himself not disapprove of them.

VOLUSIAN.—I hold myself highly obliged to you Marcellinus, replied Volusian, for the very agreeable information you have given me of things and characters in the last reign, so favourable to truth and free enquiry ; which may afford hope, that so liberal a race still subsists, although some very different men have lately been brought forward. And I confess myself extremely blameable, for insinuating any thing to the disparagement of one, who so boldly stood forth against the Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity, in his writings, as did the virtuous Dr. Clarke ; especially as I could not be acquainted with the motives that might have hindered him from going on, at the time, to act as well as write, in bringing  
about

about the reformation, he had continually in his thoughts ; nor could know what he might have done, had a longer life been given.

But whatever he, and other great men, did, or did not, in the like situations ; I can never unite again with my friends in the worship of the church, as it now stands ; in those addresses and prayers expunged out of the Liturgy by Dr. Clarke, which are directed to Jesus and the Holy Spirit ; whom I neither believe to be Gods, nor to be worshipped ; and cannot, without horror (pardon the expression, if offensive to any one,) think of being present and bearing a part, where these two supposed Gods are worshipped equally with the supreme Father.

And surely, my friends, this is not said out of any want of respect to that kind Saviour of men, whom I trust I am disposed to love and honour, now and for ever, with the affection and reverence so justly due to him, for his perfect virtue and benevolence. But I cannot make him the Supreme God, or invoke, or pray to him, as such ; because I am persuaded, that if he could hear, and make himself known to me, he would call out from heaven, as he did formerly to Paul : “ I am Jesus of Nazareth ;” one who was once a mortal man like thyself : worship God.

As I must however always think it a duty to attend upon some public worship of the Almighty Being, and can frequent none, but where he alone, the single person of the Father, is acknowledged and adored ;

adored; I must still rely upon you, who are alone privy to my situation, and the change which has lately taken place in my mind, to suggest some expedient and advice that may be of use to me; especially when in the country, where I chiefly reside. For I am persuaded, that though mine is a new case to myself, it is not new to you, who must be acquainted with many similar to it. And I hope that Photinus, who has hitherto to-day been a silent hearer of what has passed, will easily furnish me with a clue to deliver me out of this labyrinth of uncertainty, in which I am at present.

— PHOTINUS.—I have, indeed, replies Photinus, quietly listened to the debate of to-day, and have had particular pleasure in attending, Volusian, to the progress of your feelings and convictions. And if there be any thing, for which I honour you more than another, it is for that your unmoveable resolution, never on any account to play tricks with, or violate your own natural sense of things, of what is the right, the fair, the honest part before God and man, or go contrary to it, for any consideration. I applaud more than I can express, the declaration, that you trembled at the thought of lifting up, or seeming to lift up your voice to Jesus as God, to hear and to have mercy upon you, when your heart at the time told you, that he was no God, and could not hear you.

But that I may do what little is in my power to help you under your present difficulties; I would say, that

that in this happy, free country; free, from the general spirit and temper of the times, though not yet from the laws, in religious matters and disquisitions; there are not wanting, my friend, precedents and examples, to guide and encourage in situations like your's.

I may only point out, at a distance, an excellent person, of fine parts, cultivated, from the first and through life, with knowledge and science of every kind, particularly of God, his works, and his revealed will; who, many years since, wearied with, and unable any longer to endure the Athanasian worship of the church, two or three friends joining with him from the first, instituted a church in his own house: a practice truly apostolical. Here, he being the minister for a short space, made Dr. Clarke's reformed Liturgy the devotional part of the service every Sunday. Fortunately, soon after, before he had looked out for a proper place, and a person to officiate regularly, he prevailed to have this reformed service of the church adopted by a considerable, and very liberal congregation of Dissenters in the place; now become a flourishing, professed society of Unitarian Christians. Happy, in seeing successful efforts to promote the pure worship of the God and Father of all, crown the serene evening of a long life, spent in pursuit of truth, and in doing good. So may it still be prolonged!

Mention might be made of other most valuable and virtuous characters, persons likewise of no inconsiderable



considerable note, bred up in the church of England, who have entirely withdrawn from it themselves and their families, to be at liberty to worship no other God, but the Father: attentive at the same time to keep up his public worship in their own houses; that their children, and also their men-servants, and their maid-servants, if so disposed, might have it in their power to know and to worship the only living and true God, as well as themselves.

Many very respectable individuals also, and others in the more private as well as in the lower walks of life, have had their minds enlightened to see this plainest truth of all others, that the God who made them is one single person, whom alone they are to bow down to and worship; and have gradually been seceding from the church, though not in such numbers yet as to be much discerned, or missed in the great mass: who were not able to reconcile themselves to the thought of continuing to worship three Gods: for no other way could they fairly and honestly interpret; no other construction could they possibly put upon the *Litany*; upon (a) *gloria patri*,

so

(a) Viz. "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

"Doubtless this is said by many very frequently, and with great devotion. But can it be said truly? Does not that deserve consideration? Is there any such doxology in the New Testament? If not, how can it be said to have been in the beginning? Are not

so often repeated ; and many other passages of the church service.

And such instances must go on to multiply, and the light of the divine Unity to spread, till no place be found for error in this most important point. For there is a spirit of enquiry gone forth among many, to learn for themselves, what is to be known, concerning the great author of their existence, upon whom alone they have the most immediate and intimate dependence every moment, and must depend for ever. The times of darkness and ignorance are past. No longer will the Christian world suffer itself to be imposed upon by abstruse metaphysical definitions of a Deity, consisting of three Persons ; a thing so strange and unaccountable to the rational mind, that no one who reflects at all, will receive it without bringing it to the severest test of examination. And then it must immediately vanish, and come to nothing. For his works of nature, to those who can read him there, bespeak its great author to be one wise, all-powerful, benevolent artist, and parent of his rational offspring. And they who go to the fountain-head of all extraordinary divine communications, now accessible to all, and open the Bible for themselves, will find there in every page, as you, Volusian, have so recently experienced, from the testimony of Moses and all the

the books of the New Testament the most ancient, and the most authentic Christian writings in the world? &c. &c."

LARDNER, vol. ii. p, 178.

prophets,

prophets, of Jesus and his apostles, that Jéhovah, God, the Maker of all things, and kind Father of the universe, is one single Person, and all-perfect Being; to the exclusion of all other beings and persons whatsoever.

In the mean time, the supineness of not a few is most surprizing, in taking upon trust what others have decided before they were born, upon a subject of such infinite moment. A conduct of this kind is well reprov'd, with great force and seriousness, in a little piece, which I have noted, Marcellinus, in your collection. And with your good leave, and that of our friends, I shall read it to you. And this I the rather propose, as it will very well close our conversations upon the present subject, which there seems to be no call for pursuing any farther; since Volusian, after satisfying himself, that the worship of the established church is such, as he cannot with a good conscience any longer attend, does now, I flatter myself, see his way plain before him, how to act.

The author is a gentleman of learning and abilities above my praise, who was educated a member of the church of England, but retired from his connections with it, because, in his estimation, it held forth three Gods as objects of divine worship.

“ I do not indeed see,” says he, (a). “ how a Christian of any persuasion can justify to God and

(a) Preface to Objections to the Doctrine of the Trinity, &c. p. 4, 5, 6. Manchester. 1788.

his conscience, a wilful neglect of such means of religious enquiry as his situation will afford, or a continuance in the public profession of those doctrines, which his understanding shall ultimately reject. If truth in opinion, and sincerity in profession, be in any case desirable, religious truth, and religious sincerity, is peculiarly so. We are required to worship God in understanding, and in truth; and we are forbidden to offer up at the divine altar the sacrifice of fools. If the precepts of the Bible, then, are to be esteemed as of any weight among those who profess the religion of the Bible, it is a duty incumbent upon them, before all other *religious* duties, to have some well-grounded opinion concerning that Being whom they profess to adore. A correspondence between our sentiments and professions, all men expect from us; but we seem to regard the God of Truth as being far less nice in his notions of morality: and that, in the solemn offices of devotion, he will readily excuse the highest degree of wilful ignorance, and wink at the habitual commission of wilful hypocrisy.

“ Christian reader! this is no matter of barren speculation; it strikes directly at our conduct through life on a point of serious importance. The public worship of God we all consider as a duty of indispensable obligation: and whether we shall perform this worship in the way most acceptable to him, and most conformable to the precepts of the sacred writings; or in that way which best suits our indolence, or coincides with our interest; whether we shall pay  
to

to God the homage of an upright heart, or with gross negligence and solemn mockery, publicly repeat what we cannot understand, and join in professing what we do not believe ; are subjects of enquiry, which (however easy to determine) every Christian, of whatever denomination, must acknowledge to be of high concern."

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## THE CONCLUSION.

I HAVE now, Victorin, complied with your request, and given you a full account of the conversation held by our friends at \*\*\*\*\* ; which had so much raised your curiosity, and that of the persons you mention. But I shall be sorry, and much disappointed, if it do not answer some better end with them, than that of mere amusement. I hope it will excite them, if they have never yet seriously made the enquiry, to search, and satisfy their own minds, who the true God is, and to worship him only, and no other.

You will perceive, that the idolatry laid to the charge of, and as the company all agreed, proved against all the great churches, and almost all Christians, in all countries, not excepting our own, is not any thing sinful, or wicked ; but a most lamentable error concerning the Deity, which has been long a reproach to the gospel, and a bar to its reception and progress in the world ; and which therefore all that wish well to it should make haste to remove out of the way.

It will be no small satisfaction to you also to see that the famous Dr. Clarke, and other great ornaments of the church of England, since his time, were very desirous to discard out of the Liturgy, not only all direct worship of Jesus Christ, and the holy spirit ; but every word that implied divine honours to belong to them : this may afford a strong presumption, which for my part I believe to be well-grounded, that the like sentiments are entertained now, by many other thinking and learned persons in the church ; who would be ready to come forth, and declare themselves, upon any proposals and prospect of such alterations to take place in the service, as are exhibited in Dr. Clarke's reformed Liturgy. That eminent person did not indeed express himself in such strong terms concerning the worship of Christ, and of the holy spirit, which he sought to have abolished, as to call it *idolatry* ; but his entire rejection of it amounted to much the same thing. Of this, however, whether it be idolatrous or not, you will be able to form your own judgment from the *third day's* debate.

It is a reflection, which falls heavy upon our nation, that boasts of being so highly enlightened, that, whilst the Jews, by the testimony of Christ himself, worshipped Jehovah, the Father, the one true God, and still worship him ; and Mahometans, who worship the God of Abraham, do the same ; Christians, in this country, in the judgment of the excellent persons above-named, worship two other divine persons,

two other gods, upon a line of equality with the Supreme Father, who alone was worshipped by Moses and the prophets, by Jesus and his apostles, and who alone ought to be worshipped.

In the heathen world, if there were any true Theists, as it might seem there were, whatever were their private sentiments, they universally conformed to the established Polytheism, and joined in the worship of a rabble of gods, many of whom had confessedly been men and women of bad characters.

It will be well, if the same be not now the situation and conduct of men of sense and enquiry, who have not thrown off all religion, and who attend the established worship, in different Christian countries. They worship one God in private; three divine persons, three gods, or more, in public. Can there be a louder call for a review and reformation of such establishments, from time to time, than this offers?

Amidst the unavoidable instances of partial, temporary hardship, suffering, loss and confusion, attending the wonderful revolution which Divine Providence hath brought about in a neighbouring country, we rejoice, (who will not rejoice?) at the *Bastille* destroyed, at the dread of *Lettres de cachét*, and of an undefined, uncontrolled arbitrary power removed; and in the pleasing prospect of a constitution settled, where liberty will be secured, where the sound of offensive war will no more be heard, and where religion will become placed on its only just and solid basis, that of free and rational enquiry. Under God, nothing that  
he

he had promised, tending to promote virtue and human happiness, is to be despaired of. Pure Christianity, which has no other aim, we are persuaded, was at first planted by the Almighty ; and being under his protection, will prevail. Five years ago, what human sagacity could have calculated, that within so short a space, such a rational scheme of public Christian worship, as is exhibited in Dr. Clarke's reformed Common-prayer Book, should have made its way into France, and become quietly settled? Read only the account in the margin, (a) taken from one of our public

(a) *Extract of a letter from an English Gentleman at Dunkirk, dated Aug. 10, 1791.*

“ We now hope to enjoy the best benefits of the new constitution, in the exercise of our own religion. On Sunday last an English Protestant church was opened here, an object that has been long in contemplation, but never before accomplished. The number of Protestants in this place is very great, and the English are so numerous that the church was full, and many stood in the passage throughout the service, whilst others returned home for want of room. We have every appearance of forming a large and respectable society ; for the plan that is adopted has a view to the union of all the English Protestants, whether they have formerly been Episcopalians, Presbyterians, or other Dissenters. The church of England liturgy is made use of, reformed upon the plan proposed by the late Dr. Samuel Clarke, Rector of St. James's, Westminster, in which all the exceptionable parts of the Common-prayer are omitted. It is a plan that gives very general satisfaction, and many of all parties interest themselves greatly in the cause.

“ The National Assembly has provided very generously for those  
who



public prints, and which is otherwise well known to be authentic. How honourable to a government, that  
all

who dissent from the established church : all sects have the liberty of conducting burials, baptisms, and marriages, according to their own forms, and a register of them is kept in the chamber of the Tribunal. There are, in this town, two Dutch chapels, and one Quaker meeting-house, but the English church will probably be far more numerous than either of the others.

" The agreeable society kept up amongst the English families here, the cheapness of all sorts of provisions, the constant intercourse we have with England, the ease with which our few taxes are borne, and the liberality of sentiment which prevails amongst all ranks of men, added to the full and free exercise of all religions ; will probably induce many of our countrymen, from different places, to settle in this town, whose commerce is in a flourishing state."

" N. B. It is with great pleasure that I see the above letter produced in a valuable work, just published, as this sheet is printing off ; together with the following additional information upon the subject, which I am glad to insert :

" In the same town another church has been opened by a clergyman of the church of England, in which the common service is used. A mistake was however made, which, as it was the first of the kind in France, I wish it may be the last. The minister, unluckily, brought over some of his high church prejudices with him, and attempted to sow his tares amongst the wheat, by urging some of the congregation not to be married by their own minister ; *Because he was not ordained by a bishop.* This wise admonition was treated as it deserved, and served only to create a smile. I have thought it right to mention this circumstance, as I am a sincere friend to the spread of Christianity, under any of its forms. Any thing of religion is better than indolence, and vice, and that stupidity of all stupid ignorance, attachment to prejudices *because they are* prejudices.

all men, who demean themselves as good citizens, should be free to profess and practise any religion, or mode of religion, which they prefer, trinitarian, unitarian, jewish, mahometan, or pagan! And of what benefit to truth, and free enquiry, will be the appointment of similar liberal societies for public Christian worship, in other great trading towns in that country, whither Englishmen shall resort, and become settled; which is an event to be expected.

The kind parent of the universe will accept the worship of his creatures, who approach him with good dispositions, however it may be wrong, superstitious, or idolatrous. Nevertheless, where they enjoy the means of enquiry, and of attaining a better knowledge of himself, and of his unequalled glory and perfections, he will require a suitable conduct, and sincerity in them. For, to keep sight of the subject, which has been so long before you, he will be far from beholding with approbation their joining in his public wor-

prejudices. With my best wishes, therefore, of success to any of the clergy of the church of England, who may endeavour to spread the reformed religion in France, I have only to express my hope, that they will carefully avoid the blunder of their *Dunkirk* brother.

“ In the same town there are a number of Quakers, who have lately opened a place for religious worship, which I am informed is respectably attended.”—See p. 417, 418, of *The French Constitution, with Remarks, &c. &c.* By Benjamin Flower. London, printed 1792.

ship,

ship with himself, and worshipping as equal to him, two other divine persons, as gods, whom they do not believe to be gods, and whom they never think of worshipping in private, but would be self-condemned in the very thought of attempting it.

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\* \* \* *The Numerals in Roman Characters refer to the Introduction.*

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CONVERSATIONS  
ON THE  
DIVINE GOVERNMENT;

SHEWING THAT  
EVERY THING IS FROM GOD,  
AND  
FOR GOOD, TO ALL.

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AND GOD SAW EVERY THING THAT HE HAD MADE, AND BEHOLD;  
IT WAS VERY GOOD. *Genesis i. 31.*

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BY THEOPHILUS LINDSEY, M.A.

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SECOND EDITION.

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1805.

TO

MRS. SOPHIA AND MRS. FRANCES CHAMBERS,

IN GRATITUDE FOR UNWEARIED OFFICES OF THE MOST DISINTERESTED FRIENDSHIP, FOR NEARLY THIRTY YEARS, TO HIMSELF AND MRS. LINDSEY, FROM THEM AND THEIR WORTHY BROTHER, NOW, ALAS! INSENSIBLE OF ANY TRIBUTE, THOUGH EQUALLY DUE; AND IN TESTIMONY OF THEIR ENLIGHTENED ZEAL FOR THE WORSHIP OF THE ONE TRUE GOD, AND A CONSTANT UNOSTENTATIOUS READINESS TO DO GOOD;—THIS VOLUME OF CONVERSATIONS, THE RECOLLECTION AND THE FRUITS OF THE HAPPY REPOSE AND LEISURE, ENJOYED IN THEIR DELIGHTFUL SUMMER RECESS AT MORDON IN SURRY, IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR VERY AFFECTIONATE FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

## PREFACE.

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THE following work results from the study and experience of a long life, devoted principally to the service of the Gospel. From diligent researches into the true meaning and spirit of the sacred writings, the author has been led to various deviations from the creed of the established church : his opinions have, at different times, been laid before the public ; and, if the discouragements attending the profession of his faith have been very considerable, he is happy and thankful to have lived in a country, where not only such appeals have been practicable, but he has been supported by several of his countrymen, who, renouncing the errors of their education, have openly avowed their faith in only one God, the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The gloomy unjust ideas which some entertain of the Divine Being ; the avowed or restrained doubts of others with respect to the sacred history of the first ages and facts of an extraordinary interference in the deluge ; crude and unjustifiable attacks on the revered characters of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and Elisha \*, &c.

\* For a complete vindication of the characters of Elijah and Elisha, a justification of the former *for praying against rain,*  
and

&c.—These with similar things being thrown out in conversation, before those for whose peace and happiness the author is much interested, led him to turn his attention to such facts and arguments, as by others, as well as himself, have been found satisfactory.

The importance of the subject may be an apology for some repetitions; and till a full conviction is wrought in the mind, that the government of this world is the wisest that could have been adopted, and that the evils and distresses of life (of which we are not so good judges as the child just able to talk is of the corrections of a tender mother) are not permitted but for the good of all, the attention of the public cannot be too often solicited for the vindication of our Creator. Under the hope of promoting in some degree the interest of his fellow-creatures in so noble a cause, and of leading them to their happiest state, a full confidence and satisfaction in the never-ceasing love of their maker and God, the following remarks, imperfect as they are, are committed to the candour and serious attention of the benevolent reader.

*and for calling down destructive fire from heaven; and of the latter, for cursing the young men of Bethel,* see the very excellent and satisfactory sermons on these subjects, in the first volume of *Sermons* by Joseph Morris. London, 1743.

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CONVERSATIONS  
ON THE  
DIVINE GOVERNMENT,  
Ec. Ec.

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CONVERSATION I.

VICTORIN TO VOLUSIAN.

I HAVE a singular satisfaction oftentimes in recollecting a conversation which took place some years since at \*\*\*\*\*, the country-seat of our respectable friend, in which you bore no inconsiderable part, and in my opinion came off with more honour than those who were crowned in the Olympic games; an honour that, however, not to be attained without much labour and self-denial. But you gained a victory over yourself, and many narrow and inveterate religious prejudices which you had the courage to renounce, and, notwithstanding obloquy and various worldly disadvantages, have ever since remained firm in the profession and worship of the one true God and father of the universe, as prescribed and practised by Jesus Christ.

In the account of the conversation to which I allude, it is stated, that the way of worship, which you, after much inquiry and deliberation, embraced,

was that held forth to the English nation and to the church of England in particular, in the "*Amendments, humbly proposed to the Consideration of those in Authority, of the Book of Common Prayer — according to the Use of the Church of England.*" By Samuel Clarke, D.D. Rector of St. James's, Westminster." Such is the modest style, in which this excellent person speaks of what had been the fruits of many years labour and thought to promote the honour and credit of the established church, and a purer worship of God in it.

What farther information may be desired concerning this valuable manuscript work of Dr. Clarke, which, after his decease, was presented by his son Mr. Clarke to the British Museum, and deposited there, may be found in a Tract, entitled, "*Conversations on Christian Idolatry.*"

And I cannot forbear adding, that, from some facts reported at the close of that Tract, it may appear probable, that the pure worship of the One true God might silently and quietly, in a course of time, have then made its way\* in France, had the first happy revolution in that country proceeded and continued as it began, and not been followed by such dire and violent convulsions. It affords, however, a pleasing omen of what may hereafter take place there in more favourable times.

But I have run out to a much greater length than

\* See the French Constitution, pp. 371—375, the 2d edition, with corrections and additions, by Benjamin Flower.

I intended, and almost lost sight of the principal purport of my letter, which is ; that having just now come to the knowledge, that you and our common friends, the last long vacation, had passed some weeks together, and during the time had fallen upon the discussion of a very curious and interesting question, and come to an unanimous resolution upon it, *viz.* that *there is nothing really and ultimately ill in the state of man, but every thing ordered for the best for all*: I cannot find words to express the satisfaction I should receive in being made acquainted with the steps by which you have been led to this conclusion, and with all that passed relating to it. I would not give you, I should be ashamed of giving you, so much trouble merely to gratify curiosity: but it might perhaps contribute to free me from a host of anxious thoughts that beset me continually, and oftentimes make life a burden.

VOLUSIAN TO VICTORIN.

FOR one so much loved and valued as yourself, I can think no trouble too great, whereby I may give you pleasure or profit, nor can I have any reserves with you; and therefore without further preface I sit down to tell you, that the old party of your friends being met together, and lamenting not a little that you alone were prevented joining us, after talking over for a while the astonishing events of the times we lived in, we fell into consideration of the very low *repute* in which the religion of *Christ* was every where held,

held, at home and abroad; being rejected by many as entirely fabulous; and little regarded by the greater part of those who would not be thought to give it up altogether.

One, who was present, mentioned, from his own knowledge, that a short time before the French Revolution, a person lately filling a very high station, of great worth and discernment, who lived very much at Paris, and in the first circles; and was sometimes in Holland, and other parts of the continent, where he conversed with the most eminent men of different ranks and professions, found it to be a general persuasion among them all, though it was not his own, that the Christian religion would soon be at an end; being experienced, as exhibited and enforced by public authority in all states, to be so irrational a system, and hostile to the true interests and happiness of society, as to be incapable of maintaining its ground any longer. What followed soon after in France is well known.

Nor was this the case of those called catholic countries only, where the state-religion was so offensive to every mind in any degree enlightened. He would appeal to them all, as they were not ignorant of what passed among ourselves, whether they had not long observed, that our established articles of faith, and the worship grounded upon them, passing for the very gospel of *Christ*, had not caused many silently to withdraw themselves, and take refuge in the religion of nature's teaching: and this indisposition  
to

to Christianity had much prevailed within these last twenty years, and was rapidly increasing.

Here Photinus, interposing, replied ; that he did not like to hear them descant in so desponding a strain on a subject which seemed to him by no means to call for it ; because the prostrate appearance of Christianity in our own and the neighbouring countries, and the hostility of many to it, might be shown to arise, not from any newly discovered weakness or deficiency in its proofs, but from other causes which might be assigned ; but principally, perhaps, from the interference of the civil power, in requiring this religion, exactly as modelled and taught by them, to be believed and practised by all, under the severest penalties and loss ; thereby creating prejudices against it ; and also hindering all free inquiry into it, by which alone it could maintain its pre-eminence in the world, if it were the truth ; and thus turning it almost in all places into an engine of state, to keep mankind in slavery and darkness.

: This it was which so much excited the philosophers of France, as they called themselves, to oppose the Bible, and filled them with a most unreasonable antipathy to it ; being prepossessed with an idea, that the religion built upon it, which they found professed in their own country, was a fanaticism so hurtful, and sanguinary, and adverse to every thing virtuous and friendly to mankind, that it was meritorious to destroy it by any means ; so that they made no scruple

of using the most unfair arts, and adopting known falsehoods, to effect their purpose.

Of this dishonest dealing, to give it its true name, you have continual examples in the writings of Mons. de Voltaire, where he touches on the subject; but his unworthy artifice and disingenuousness in this respect are detailed at length in \* Letters said to be of several Portuguese, German, and Polish Jews to M. de Voltaire, in 3 vols. 8vo.; but really written by a learned priest and doctor of the Sorbonne. Mr. Findlay also in 1770, formerly the learned president of Glasgow-college, has well exposed these practices, by which this eminent writer has stained his great abilities, and lessened his character.

As the best things have ever been liable to be perverted, we must frankly acknowledge, for no one acquainted with history can deny, that great corruptions have arisen from the Gospel, and abuses to the worst purposes have been made of it, and caused many to think ill of and condemn it. A fair inquirer, however, will confess that it has always been of considerable benefit to mankind; and that it is in itself most friendly to the peace and happiness of society, as was testified by a candid Heathen † historian of the fourth century, upon seeing the disturbances to which it innocently

\* *Lettres de quelques Juifs Portugais, Allemands et Polonois, à M. de Voltaire.* A Paris, 1776.

† *Ammianus Marcellinus. Lib. xxii. c. 11.*

Quæ nihil nisi justum suadet et lenè.

gave occasion, and the murders, and cruelties towards each other, which the Christians were guilty of at that early period. And notwithstanding the present indifference, and desertion of many, and the assaults made upon the Gospel by its various adversaries even from the first, (none more fierce and subtle than those of the present day,) we may not be afraid boldly to maintain, that it stands upon a rock that cannot be shaken; viz. upon the truth of this single fact, of *Jesus*, its author, being a divinely authorized teacher, a prophet of God; which was evinced and confirmed by the miracles wrought by him, to which he appealed; and, principally, by his being raised from the dead in three days, in conformity to his own predictions.

The divine authority likewise of Moses, the Jewish lawgiver, his predecessor, was built on the like immovable foundation of a divine interposition, signified by mighty miracles, publicly wrought, and recognized by their *effects* at the time, in the reception of such a religion, at first, so burdensome and irksome, by the Israelites, not otherwise to be accounted for but on the footing of real miracles; *effects*, which, if we may so speak, have continued to the present hour, in the rigorous adherence of that people and their descendants to their religion, under the temptations which they have continually had to desert it; scattered, moreover, as they have been, and are, over the face of the whole earth, and most unworthily and unceasingly vilified and ill treated as Jews, wherever they go; its truth

truth also corroborated still farther by the actual fulfilment of antient \* prophecies relating to the dispersion and other circumstances of this extraordinary people; not to mention the attestation given to their religion, from the Gospel being a continuation of one and the same extraordinary plan of divine providence for the virtuous improvement and happiness of the whole human race.

To these revelations from heaven by Moses and by Jesus Christ, for the most beneficent purposes, to make mankind virtuous and happy; it is objected, that their foundations fail on being examined; because the proofs of the interposition of the divine Being in their favour are not to be depended upon, resting solely on the testimony of weak and fallible mortals; who have in all ages delighted in inventing, listening to, and propagating stories of wonderful things, of apparitions and communications with their false gods, to countenance their various superstitions and idolatrous practices, and such practices have been too much imitated and encouraged by Christians themselves.

The imputation must be allowed to have some foundation; and this credulous turn and weakness ought ever to put us on our guard, that we suffer not

\* See, to name no others, Moses's prophecy concerning the captivity of the Israelites, of a state not yet erected; and the exact fulfilment of Christ's prophecy, not to say of that of Moses, in so many exact particulars, and the long captivity that was to follow. Deut. xxviii. Luke xix. xxi.



ourselves to be deceived by false pretences to a divine extraordinary power : but it does not invalidate the testimony of mankind to those instances of it which are accompanied with sufficient evidence, and not loaded with any unnatural contradictory circumstances.

It should be remembered, however, that it is a misrepresentation of these divine interpositions in behalf of the Gospel, when it is alleged that they are brought to prove the truth of its doctrines, of which, unquestionably, they are not proper proofs; those primary truths, for instance, of Christ's religion, and of all true religion; namely, that God is to be loved and obeyed before all things; that virtue, or the love of our fellow-creatures, so as to seek their happiness as our own, is to be cultivated by us: these and the like doctrines have their proper evidence, founded in the nature of man and the relation between him and his Maker, independent of miracles, which can add nothing to them in that respect.

The proper province and design of miracles is, to confirm the authority of a prophet or divine messenger in what he delivers concerning the will and government of God, and men's future destination, where their natural light and faculties fail them. And in this view; for this purpose, Christ constantly appealed to them; referring men to *the works* which his Father impowered him to perform, as the evidence of his coming from God; of which they were the direct proofs;—although they are calculated, and may also be

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designed,

designed, to revive and powerfully to recall men's attention to important truths within their knowledge, but overlooked and neglected by them.

Some, indeed, would prejudice and set aside at once the whole of the extraordinary and divine communications recorded in the Scriptures, as entirely fabulous, arguing it to be inconsistent with the character and attributes of the great first cause, the supreme, all-perfect Being, and therefore impossible for him to alter the course of nature established by himself, and to interrupt those laws of his own appointment, by which he governs and preserves the world.

We should here take care, that we are not imposed on by words that signify nothing. For what do we mean by *nature*, but the art, if we may so speak, of the great Creator, his workmanship; the regular succession of causes and effects appointed by him; by which every thing is brought to pass? And who shall take upon him to say, that it is unbecoming him, or that his power is in any way limited and restrained so that he cannot interrupt the general order of things appointed by himself, to promote his wise and benevolent designs?

Perhaps this prejudice or difficulty, that has been started against all miraculous interpositions, as implicating weakness of conduct in the supreme Being, we may, on a nearer inspection, perceive to take its rise purely from men's imperfect conceptions of the divine agency and government.

Here, we must ever profess ourselves in the dark,  
and

and most defective in our judgments, concerning the manner in which the Deity acts ; and therefore speak with reverence and confidence.

But, as we are persuaded, from what we see and know, that he made all things with most consummate wisdom, and for the best purposes of universal good, our highest thoughts of him lead us to conclude, that, when he created the world, all future events were before him, known and foreseen in their causes ; and every the minutest circumstance relating to every creature contrived and directed ultimately to answer the end designed ; since, without this, his wise and kind designs might be liable to be continually crossed and defeated.

In agreement with this idea, the apostle says, Acts xv. 18. *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.* And we may humbly presume, that we do not err in supposing that the Almighty did at first, and originally, so devise and lay out his course of nature, as we term it, the whole train of causes and effects, all that was to befall his whole creation and each individual in it, throughout all future time, that those events, which we call supernatural, should be the result of established laws and a more comprehensive plan of things, though unperceived by us ; as much as the most ordinary events, our sustenance and support in life, and that of all other animals, is the effect of those laws that we see to be established. So that, in the eye of a Being who could take in the whole of the divine administration  
and

and operations, those called miraculous are as much the result of general laws, as the most ordinary events.

The *course of nature*, of which we hear so much, and cannot hear too much, if properly viewed and considered by us; those most curious and exact laws, both in the natural and moral system, by which the universe is upheld and preserved, we cannot sufficiently extol and admire. Those who have most minutely scanned and inquired into and best understood them, Barrow, Boyle, Maclaurin, (to name a few only of our own countrymen,) have not been able to contain themselves from breaking out into such holy raptures in contemplation of that wisdom and goodness which formed and preserves the whole of things, as might kindle a flame of devotion in the coldest breast.

This may be a lesson to us, in our study of nature and its stupendous laws, not to lose sight of the great Being, who framed it: For we find some so swallowed up in their disquisitions and researches into the wonderful contrivance with which all the parts of the vast machine are put together, and so doting on their discoveries of some of the secret powers and energies by which it is conducted, as to imagine, that these powers and energies are something, as it were, inherent in matter, distinct from and independent of its maker. And as all things seem to go on of themselves, (for they see not *him* whose\* secret agency directs and supports the whole,) they are blindly led

\* Heb. xi. 27.

on to speculate, whether all things did not also begin of themselves without him; and thus fall into the gulph of Atheism, which sees nothing superior to itself in the universe.

To guard against so fatal a delusion, I beg, my friends, you will excuse my urging it upon you, to hold fast the plain old argument for Deity, obvious to every understanding, and equally decisive to the highest as the lowest; viz. that next to the consciousness and conviction which we have of our own existence, there is nothing of which we can be so absolutely certain, or which is so clearly demonstrable to us, as that there is a God, an intelligent first cause, and benevolent author of all things; because, otherwise the world we live in, with all its furniture and inhabitants, constructed with the most consummate art, and abounding, at every view, the more it is sought into, with innumerable marks of wisdom and kind design; connected also and mutually dependent throughout all its parts, as far as we can descry, must have come into being of itself, without any original designing mind: which is a supposition not to be entertained by any one whose intellectual powers are sound and unimpaired.

I remember D'Alembert, who was careful latterly not to concede too much upon this question, in his correspondence with the King of Prussia, is compelled to say, “ \* I think particularly, that with regard to the

\* Je pense en particulier, par rapport à l'existence d'une intelligence suprême, que ceux qui la nient avancent bien plus qu'ils

the existence of a supreme intelligence, those who deny it go much farther than they can warrant, and what in all this business there is an unreasonable scepticism. Certainly no one can deny, that there is in the universe, and particularly in the structure of plants and animals, such a combination of parts as manifests intelligence, and proves the existence of this intelligence as a watch proves the existence of a watchmaker. This appears to be undeniable."

The same thought is taken up by Voltaire, p. 4, of his Reply to the System of Nature \*. "Your savage, (says he, ch. v. p. 11, p. 159,) who guesses a watch to be the work of a watchmaker, because he has some idea of the effects of the industry of man, is precisely the proof I offer of the existence of God. I am that savage. The watch is the universe. I have some idea of industry in general. I behold the world, in

ne peuvent prouver, et qu'il n'y a dans cette matière que la scepticisme déraisonnable. On ne peut nier sans doute, qu'il n'y a dans l'univers, et en particulier dans la structure des animaux et des plantes, de combinaisons de parties qui semblent déceler une intelligence; elles prouvent l'existence de cette intelligence, comme une montre prouve l'existence d'un horloger; cela paraît incontestable.

\* Votre sauvage qui devine qu'une montre est faite par un horloger, parce qu'il a quelque idée de l'industrie humaine, est précisément la preuve de l'existence de Dieu. Je suis le sauvage : la montre est l'univers : l'horloger est le formateur de l'univers. J'ai quelque idée de l'industrie en général : je vois le monde, dans lequel une industrie merveilleuse éclate de toutes parts ; et j'adore l'auteur.—*RÉPONSE au Système de la Nature*, p. 12.

which

which a wonderful industry displays itself on all sides, and I adore the author."

Mirabaud, or whoever was the author of that work, must have been affected, when, at the close of a similar argument, Voltaire turns to him\*, "Why, my friend, why will you not let me adore that great intelligent Being, who has bestowed life and thought upon me? Let me add, Take care of being found ungrateful; you, to whom he has given such talents and powers! It is certain, you have not given them to yourself."

It is not, however, entirely, men's doubts concerning the possibility or reality of miracles, or concerning the truth of the sacred history connected with them; nor any presumed discoveries of the hidden powers and energies of nature, that have put them on rejecting divine revelation, and led not a few of them to deny the being of a God, and take refuge in the gloomy idea of a fatherless world. It is a difficulty of a more serious kind, from which it sometimes originates; the perplexity that worthy thinking persons are often thrown into, how to reconcile appearances in the world of nature, and the imperfect and forlorn state of mankind, with the supposition of a perfectly wise and good moral administration. If, say they, there be a being perfectly wise and good at the head

\* *Pourquoi ne voulez-vous pas que j'adore ce grand Etre intelligent et puissant, qui m'a donné la vie et la pensée? J'ajouterai, Craignez d'être ingrat, vous à qui il a donné tant d'esprit; ce n'est pas certainement vous qui vous l'êtes donné.*

*RÉPONSE au Système de la Nature, p. 111.*

of

of the universe, why such a miserable world, so much natural evil, pain and suffering, and so much vice and wretchedness? Why are not all men virtuous and happy? and, Why so little apparent amendment for the better among Christians, and so great a majority of them doomed to endless suffering hereafter, or to annihilation, with so great an expence of miracles and of a divine extraordinary power made to so little purpose?

Could we find a clue to lead us safe out of this labyrinth, and to teach us how to justify the dealings of God with mankind, consistently with that perfect goodness which we must ever ascribe to him, if we believe him to be at all; we shall provide the best remedy against, and in time put an end to, the prevailing scepticism.

Here the company rising up, Marcellinus, in the name of them all, declared their obligations to Phœtinus, for giving them cause not to despair of the fortunes and success of the Gospel, notwithstanding its present low condition; and for so seasonably reminding them of the solid foundation on which the belief of God, the infinitely wise creator and supreme governor of all things, was immoveably placed; as this must lead the way to all satisfactory inquiry concerning his dispositions towards us and our expectations from him.

He was also persuaded; that he should speak the sentiments of all present, as well as his own, by suggesting, that if they could but engage the friend, to whom



whom they already owed so much, to favour them with those farther thoughts which they knew he had well digested upon this very weighty subject, there would be nothing more for them to desire, and therefore he would take the liberty to be their spokesman and entreat his compliance.

To this Photinus frankly replied, that to take such a task upon him on so formal an invitation was quite formidable to a plain man, and implied too much expectation; but, if they could be contented with knowing in what manner he had endeavoured to satisfy his own mind in a matter of so much importance, he should not be unwilling to gratify them. But, as they all might well be wearied with such a long grave discourse, he should propose their taking up the subject again at their next meeting. To this the company assented, and the result of our future conversation I shall take the first opportunity of communicating.

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## CONVERSATION II.

### SECTION I.

On the day fixed, the company being assembled, Volusian, who during the former conversation had been very attentive, expressed much satisfaction that all the party had been punctual to the appointment; and,

and, addressing his discourse particularly to Photinus, told him, that he had listened with much satisfaction to all that had fallen from him, but might probably have misunderstood what he had advanced concerning those who rejected divine revelation, as being commonly induced to it from dark views of the present scene of things and of the ways of providence, which indisposed them towards the Deity, and all communications from him. This might be true in some instances, but there were many exceptions to it, and one of great note, the noble author of the *Characteristicks*, who was well known to have admirably pleaded the cause of a God and a providence: and to have maintained that, in the world, the constitution of things is perfectly moral, vice the road to misery, and the virtuous of mankind happy: although at times he too plainly intimated his disregard for the sacred volumes, especially that of the Old Testament.

Photinus thanked him for his observations, and for giving him an opportunity of further explaining his sentiments. He had no doubt himself that the character of unbelievers of the present day was pretty much as he had described it. But he was not insensible that there were some of a very different class, who acknowledged on all proper occasions, and shewed a profound reverence for the Deity, and gave reason to believe that they endeavoured in their actions to approve themselves to him. If the author of the *Characteristicks* is to be reckoned in that class, few Christians, it must be confessed, seem im-  
pressed

pressed with so full and constant a sense of the divine presence and benignity, and those cheerful expectations of favour hereafter, with which it appeared he was penetrated, from innumerable passages in his writings, where it is evident he spoke from the heart, and from the most serious conviction.

One passage, which I hope never to forget, in his "Inquiry concerning Virtue," p. 37, bespeaks this in a high degree; and I shall gratify you, I am persuaded, by repeating it: "Where the theistical belief," says he, "is entire and perfect, there must be a steady opinion of the superintendency of a supreme Being; a witness and spectator of human life, and conscious of whatever is felt or acted in the universe: so that in the perfectest recess, or deepest solitude, there must be ~~one~~ still presumed remaining with us; whose presence singly must be of more moment than that of the most august assembly upon earth. In such a Presence 'tis evident, that as the shame of guilty actions must be the greatest of any, so must the honour be of well doing, even under the unjust censure of a world." Of one thing however I cannot doubt, that if he ever relinquished his belief of Christianity, which is a thing by no means certain, he was much indebted to it for those lessons of the most pure and sublime morality, on account of which his writings are justly admired.

But now we are thrown upon the subject, as we are not limited in our time, it may not only be an amusement, but of some use, to endeavour to state,  
whether

whether there be any grounds for Christians to reckon this celebrated person one of their number.

It is to be collected from those very scanty memorials which are preserved of this third Earl of Shaftsbury, that from his infancy a very extraordinary care was taken to bring him acquainted with the learned languages of Greece and Rome, the key to all the knowledge of the antients, in which he afterwards excelled in an eminent degree; and we may be assured an especial attention would also be paid to form the mind to every thing that bore relation to piety and virtue, as Mr. Locke is known to have been particularly consulted in the care of his education.

His seriousness in the profession of the Christian religion, into which he was early initiated, is recounted on several occasions in his youth, and seems to have grown up with him. But what principally shewed his firm and rational conviction of the truth of the Gospel, his high value for it, and zeal and earnestness to bring others to the knowledge of it, and to imbibe its spirit, was a publication made by him, in 1698, when he was 27 years of age, of a volume of sermons by Dr. Whichcot, a divine of the church of England, justly held in the highest reverence and esteem. These sermons this young man of quality was at the pains to search out and collect, from persons who had taken them down in short-hand as they were delivered from the pulpit, such being the modesty of this very celebrated preacher in his day, both in the university of Cambridge and, afterwards in this great city, as  
would

would never let him print any of his discourses. The noble editor appears to have been very accurate in preparing the volume for the press, which he published with a preface of his own of some length, but without his name.

In this preface, Lord Ashley, for his father was then living, speaks of Christianity, as one that understood and loved it; as “a religion where love is chiefly enjoined; where the heart is expressly called for; and the outward action without that is disregarded; and charity (or kindness) is made all in all.” And throughout the whole of the discourses, it is seen, what excellent creatures in all respects mankind would become, if influenced and governed by the principles of the Gospel.

Several years afterwards, from February 1707 to July 1710, we have a series of Letters, written after he came to his estate and titles, to a young student at the university of Oxford, who was there, at his expence and under his direction, preparing for the ministry in the church of England. These letters bespeak the writer’s high value for Christianity, and shew, in a most edifying manner, those sentiments of true piety and genuine goodness by which he was constantly guided himself, and which he strove to instil into this young person\*.

Soon

\* A beautiful edition of Lord Shaftsbury’s Letters to a student of the university was republished a few years ago, and distributed by James Martin, Esq. the truly conscientious member for

Tewkes-

Soon after this, in the year 1711, he went abroad on account of his health, which had long been very delicate and precarious, and died at Naples, in the beginning of the year 1713, having barely completed his 42d year.

A slight presumption ought not, it would seem, to overset the weight of this evidence for the author of *the Characteristicks* being a Christian; and yet we shall meet with some things that will cause hesitation. We have his writings, which may be said to contain his real sentiments, as they were revised by him for republication, during the leisure which his long stay at Naples afforded him in the two last years of his life.

In them he appears to have contracted undue prejudices against some distinguished characters and

Tewkesbury, as one way among many others in which he might enlighten and benefit mankind, ever his desire and delight.

I would beg leave here to bear my testimony to a truly laudable though rare custom, instituted by the above gentleman, of daily collecting his children and family before breakfast to hear a moral or instructive discourse, or a sermon, as it happens; and concluding by a short address to the Divine Being: thus beginning every day as a Christian ought; and which cannot enough be recommended and followed.

No company in the house interrupts this service, no business, either in town or country: And children thus inured to sit still and listen must learn something, and when older are called to read the prayer aloud, getting by such means a habit and impressions which can never wholly die away and be lost in their future intercourse with the world.

transactions,

transactions, which are spoken of with commendation in the sacred writings, betraying too great a willingness to see things in the most unfavourable point of view. This appears in his disposition to give credit to other historians rather than those who were most competent to the facts they treat of ; in what he says concerning the rite of circumcision among the Hebrews ; in his insinuations against Abraham, and imputing his readiness, at the known command of God, to have put his son to death, to a proveness for human sacrifices in those days, instead of extolling the pious and right dispositions he shewed on that occasion, which this noble author would not have failed to do, had he considered the history and all its circumstances without prejudice ; in his seeking to depreciate and asperse the fair unspotted name of Joseph, governor of the country under Pharaoh, as combined with the priests of Egypt, to enslave the nation to the king, and put their whole property into his hands, from having married into the family of one of them. Equally uncandid and groundless were his accusations of Moses on similar suspicions and surmises : for, had he met with such characters in Grecian story, he would not have ceased to applaud and admire them ; the Hebrew youth, as a most amiable pattern of filial piety, generous fraternal affection, and purity of manners ; and the Hebrew legislator, for his consummate wisdom, and for devoting himself and all his powers, without any self-seeking, to the good of others.

Such hasty condemnation, in these and some other instances,

instances, he would not have suffered himself to pass, if, without undue bias, he had calmly considered, That men chosen of God for important purposes, and therefore extraordinarily favoured by him, were not; nor was it necessary they should be, faultless persons; that in the infancy of a commonwealth, of a nature so peculiar as that of the Hebrews, a harsher discipline might at first be needed: as for instance, in adjudging the man (Numb. xv.) that gathered sticks on the sabbath to be stoned to death, to restrain and deter others from the violation of its laws in future, and in things of greater moment.

And with regard to the extermination of the idolatrous nations of Canaan, and the severities and destruction accompanying it, which have been much exaggerated, and may hereafter be noted; may it not deserve to be considered, whether in the instance of a general destruction enjoined of innocent children with persons grown up, such proceedings might not be authorized by the righteous moral governor of the world, in mercy to the unfortunate sufferers themselves; whilst, in putting an end to the lives of his creatures, he put an end to the most horrid vice, (in which the young would have been trained, and others grown worse,) by continuing in which they would only have been more and more removed from, and with more difficulty recovered and brought back to virtue and to true happiness.

Add to this, a most important consideration, that such temporary severity tended immediately to deter  
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and prevent the Israelites and the nations around from becoming infected with and going on in such practices, for which these people were doomed to suffer; I mean practices not to be named; of the most defiling, promiscuous commerce between the sexes; and of that dreadful superstition which led them to make their children pass through the fire to be consumed in it, in honour of their false gods.

Had the pure, well-disposed mind of Lord Shaftsbury been sufficiently unwarped to behold these things in their true light, he would have been far from imputing blame here. He who was penetrated with a full persuasion of the perfect unlimited goodness of the universal parent; and of the present life being only a beginning to a progressive state of his rational offspring, for their improvement in virtue and happiness for ever\*.

However he might sometimes affect to speak lightly of the argument from miracles, the only one that can fully prove to us a divine revelation, he sometimes shewed that he understood and valued it, and would by no means be thought to reject it. In the *Characteristicks*, vol. ii. p. 332, 333, 334, there is a fine passage to this purpose, the whole of which deserves perusal. The noble writer begins with establishing, as he styles it, "a just and rational foundation for

\* See Lord Shaftsbury's Letters, p. 20. Mr. Martin's edition.

our faith, on which we may give credit to a divine revelation; namely, when it comes recommended to us by the testimony of those whose characters and lives might answer for them as to the truth of what they reported to us from God." And he then very properly remarks, that miracles of themselves are proofs only of superior power; and that we must be persuaded that the power is under the direction of supreme wisdom and goodness; in short, that there is a God, who by his wise and good providence appoints and governs all things, before we can rely on any miraculous communications from him; and then concludes in these words; "To whom therefore the Laws of this Universe and its Government appear just and uniform; to him they speak the Government of one JUST ONE; to him they *reveal* and witness a God: and laying in him the foundation of this *first* Faith, they fit him for a *subsequent* one. He can then hearken to *Historical Revelation*: and is then fitted (and not till then) for the reception of any Message or miraculous *Notice* from above; where he knows beforehand all is just and true. But this no power of Miracles, nor any Power besides his *Reason*, can make him know or apprehend." He who writes in this sort cannot justly be pronounced a rejector of all miracles, or disbeliever of divine revelation.

It must not be omitted, that in the year 1710, Lord Shaftsbury having been informed by the young man whom he had educated for the ministry, at the university of Oxford, that he had been very lately ordained

ordained by Dr. Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, thus, among other things, writes back to him: "July 10th, 1710. I hope whatever advice the great and good bishop gave you, will sink deeply into your mind: and that your receiving *orders* from the hands of so worthy a prelate will be one of the circumstances, which may help to insure your steadiness in honesty, good principles, moderation and true Christianity."—— "As for my part of kindness and friendship to you, I shall be sufficiently recompensed, if you prove (as you have ever promised) a virtuous, pious, sober, and studious man, as becomes the solemn charge belonging to you."—— "The thorough knowledge you have had of me, and the direction of all my studies and life to the promotion of religion, virtue and the good of mankind, will (I hope) be of some good example to you: at least it will be a hindrance to your being seduced by *infamies* and *calumnies*; such as are thrown upon the men called *moderate*, and in their style indifferent in religion, heterodox, and heretical."

"I pray God to bless you in your new function, with all the true virtue, humility, moderation, and meekness, which becomes it.

I am your hearty friend,

S."

It should now seem from these facts and authorities laid together, that we must in all equity conclude, that this celebrated writer did not make the

declarations we have seen in favour of Christianity with a view to deceive; that he was not acting a part, but was a real believer of the religion for which he uniformly professed such a high regard.

We cannot certainly decide that the free notions and sarcastic raillery in which he indulged with respect to some of the histories in the Old Testament, amounted to an entire rejection of its divine authority: but this we may conclude, that his scepticism in this respect, whatever it was, did not appear to him incompatible with a sincere belief and profession of Christianity.

Nor are we to think otherwise of him, for the insinuations he sometimes throws out against the gospel-morality, as being deficient in teaching the duties of friendship, of the love of liberty and of our country; objections which serve only to expose his learned vanity and ignorance: but it appears, as far as can be judged from his sentiments and conduct, that he was, and was desirous of passing for, a Christian; and also wished such a judgment to be formed of him by posterity.

We may then, perhaps, be permitted to represent to ourselves the manner in which the author of the *Characteristicks* would have been received by our divine master Jesus, if he had met with such a character in his walks through Judea. May we not imagine to ourselves, that after some severe rebukes for his high self-conceit, and other grievous defects, bordering upon and springing from it, and after pointing

out

out the necessity of the severe discipline to be exercised over his imagination, which had sadly misled him, our Saviour would, in favour of his general disposition, and principles, have spoken kindly to him and encouraged him, with the words of hope and consolation, "*Thou art not far from the kingdom of God ?*"

But it is high time to go on with our subject, though we have not wandered far out of our way, in this long digression ; for which we are much beholden to Volusian, as it has brought before us a most amiable and accomplished person, who thought, and who contributed to make others think, well of the world, and its maker, which is no small encouragement to us.

It is then with great pleasure, my friends, that I begin with noting, that as there is nothing, which we can possibly be more concerned to know, than that the power that made us is benevolently disposed to us, and to all his creatures; he has not been wanting in furnishing us with a knowledge so necessary to our peace. For although we do not behold him with our bodily eyes, we can see in his works, and dealings with us, and with every living creature, how great and good he is. It may, indeed, be called the verdict and sentiment of nature ; because in all ages, where any believed in God, they believed him to be good : seeing the marks of kind design every where, and in every thing, they could frame no other idea of the sovereign Creator, than as intending the happiness of  
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the things he had made ; not to receive any benefit himself, for he wanted not any thing ; but to impart and communicate from his boundless ocean of goodness to all. And it is a fact of great notoriety, that what put men at first upon the thought of there being a powerful independent evil principle, was, their not being able otherwise satisfactorily to account to themselves for the evil and misery which were in the world, and because they were persuaded that nothing but good could come from God.

But this universal sentiment and impression concerning the Deity being found among all his rational offspring, that he is of the most perfect goodness, though highly deserving attention, as the genuine testimony which his works bear to the character of their author, does not prove him to be such to the anxious inquiring mind, whilst so many things seem to wear a contrary aspect. That can only be made to appear by such a research and particular examination as will convince us, that all creatures are intended for happiness, and put into the way of enjoying it.

Now wherever we turn our eyes, to the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the watry tribes, or the numberless insect race, we see them cheerful and happy, and their happiness secured to them in a manner suited to their nature and conditions. It is most obvious, and mankind have very early noticed it, with regard to themselves, as a mark of kind design in their maker, that the organs of their body, which are of chief moment for comfort and well-being, and of  
most

most constant use, are most studiously guarded from injury, and advantageously placed ; the eye elevated on high for the better discovery of objects ; the ear likewise for the greater advantage of hearing ; so likewise the organ of smelling near the mouth, for a guide in the choice of food. And the same kind attention and disposition of these principal organs are observable in the infinite variety of the different species of the animal création, accommodated to their form and way of life.

And as the world is God's House, and all the living creatures in it, part of his family, carrying on their different works and business in it, for a limited season : and as he intended a succession of its inhabitants to be continued, he has therefore made proper provision for their propagation ; and also for their comfortable support ; which is either put in their immediate possession, when brought into life, or so placed within their reach, that by the easy use of their powers it may be secured.

The utmost care is taken of all animals when young, and unable to provide for themselves. This is generally done by their parents, especially the mothers, who acquit themselves therein with astonishing perseverance, fidelity and tenderness, which naturalists can never enough admire ; encountering the greatest difficulties and dangers in the protection of them, and shewing the greatest self-denial in procuring them sustenance. And it is so ordered, that their natural affection and care cease, when there is

no

no further call for them. Where this office is not performed by the parent, they are directed to lay their eggs, or produce their young, in places, where when born they instantly find their nourishment in the greatest abundance.

All the different tribes of animals are furnished with their proper food, so as not to interfere with each other: and all know what is salutary for them by their several senses, their food being made pleasant and inviting to them. Innumerable are the benevolent contrivances of the author of nature for their accommodation in this respect. In those seasons of the year, when the food of some animals is not to be obtained in one country, they are found to traverse land and seas, exactly at the proper seasons, to procure it in another, and sail through the air by a more certain intuitive guidance than the mariner's compass. Others are so formed, that in winter, for instance, when their food is not to be obtained, they subsist without it, and live concealed in their retiring places till spring approaches. Those animals which are the most generally useful, are found in the greatest number, and almost in all countries. And the more uncommon ones are to be seen only in those climates and situations, where they are best provided for, and most useful and happy; as the rein-deer in Lapland, and the camel in the hot countries bordering on the sandy deserts.

Nor is it any exception to the goodness of the creator, that many animals are made to prey and feed  
upon



upon one another. Ravenous beasts, tigers, wolves, &c. are not numerous, are soon destroyed where the earth is inhabited and cultivated; and, in the mean time, they call forth men's active powers, are of use to prevent other animals from multiplying too fast. Also, in general, they are only hurtful when provoked by some injury, or stimulated by hunger. How often would the labour of the husbandman be entirely frustrated in his expectations from sowing his grain and seeds, if birds of prey did not live upon the maggots and worms that infest the tender blade and bud! To prevent the like mischievous effects, the wild boar and timid hare are destined to be hunted down and destroyed by other animals. The minutest flies and insects furnish food to the smaller birds, that enliven our atmosphere by their notes and by their dexterity in their flights; and was not the vast multitude of these in some countries to be the nourishment of the feathered race, the astonishing swarms of them would, at times, darken the atmosphere, and render life uncomfortable.

But by this kind contrivance, and multiplication of living creatures, an infinitely greater number enjoy existence and are made happy by it, than there would otherwise have been. And though it be very short, they enjoy their little day of life, without any regret at parting with it, and make room thereby for others to succeed, and be happy in their turn. And with respect to those tamer domestic animals, which mankind kill for their food, they become happier,

thereby from the extraordinary care taken of their health and nourishment. It is necessary, moreover, to destroy them, as, otherwise, the earth would be overrun and so filled by them, as not to yield sufficient food for mankind. It is a strict duty, however, for which all will be responsible, to put an end to their being in the easiest and shortest way. And, as they have no presentiment of what is to happen to them, the abridging of their lives is no injury, as they suffer less by this premature death, than by dying of disease and old age :

The lamb thy riot dooms to bleed to-day,  
Had he thy reason, would he skip and play?  
Pleas'd to the last, he crops the flow'ry food,  
And licks the hand just rais'd to shed his blood.  
Oh! blindness to the future, kindly given,  
That each may fill the circle mark'd by heav'n!

*Essay on Man. Ep. i.*

We, also, as partakers of the same nature with our fellow-animals around us, have our full share, as such, in the kindness and care of the common Creator. His goodness meets us at our birth, and provides for us in our first helpless state. He has contrived all the objects of our several senses to be pleasing to us, indicating thereby that he intends us to be gratified by them.

Pleasure is, indeed, our natural feeling, accompanying the application and exercise of all our powers, and discovering itself most remarkably, as has been observed, in the playful disposition of young children ;  
which,

which, when there is no reason against it, ought ever to be indulged.

Nor is it any mark of unkindness or indifference towards us, in our Creator, that we are subject also to painful feelings, but the contrary; as they frequently arise from what would be hurtful to us, and put us upon avoiding it. The pains of hunger and thirst, which are among the first we experience, and which continue through life, are not only constant sources of delight to us, but are necessary to excite us to the care of our health and to labour, without which we should be in danger of becoming torpid, useless, and miserable.

Some of the acutest pains, to which we are exposed, are evidently the accidental, not the natural effects of our frame. Diseases, in general, are an effort of the constitution, to relieve from something that would be prejudicial to us; for which providence, by the means of human industry and ingenuity, hath furnished us with many effectual remedies, and by the same industry and ingenuity of men more are daily discovered, and epidemical diseases, by alarming men's fears, put them on more minute investigation, in diligently studying their causes, so as to prevent them in future, and more lives are preserved.

Nor can we complain of a want of benevolence, in there being so many causes at hand continually for the destruction of us, as of other animals. For we and all animals were born to die. This is the condition

dition of the present life. The manner of dying is in itself of little moment.

It is necessary to make room for others of our fellow-creatures after us, to act their parts, whatever be the design of placing us on the stage of this world; that as we have had our day and time of life, and finished our parts, others may succeed and finish theirs. And when, as it sometimes happens, in vastly greater numbers, the different actors are swept off the stage by earthquakes, by war, pestilence, and the like, the sufferers themselves have the least reason of complaint, as the easiest way of going out of the world is to be called out on the sudden.

If this were to be the whole of our existence, as it may be, for aught we know, of our fellow animals, there would be no reason to murmur; but to be thankful, for having lived in this fair world, and enjoyed an over-balance of happiness in it. For that happiness abounds, is plain from this, that mankind are universally fond of life, and cling to it with avidity to the last, to its very dregs: which would not be the case, were it not pleasant to them. The very few who make away with themselves, are not hurried on to it by any comparative view or feeling of the miseries of life above its pleasures or enjoyments; but, where the motive can be perceived, it is generally found to be some pressing anxiety of the moment, which they have not the courage to resist, whence they cowardly give way and fall under it.

It

It is most consolatory, that we can thus attain full satisfaction concerning the happiness of mankind and of all sentient beings in the present state, as we have thereby full evidence of the goodness of the Power that gave us our being, by its effects: for it might have left some suspicion, that all was not fair and kind above, if we had been referred to an unknown, untried future state for proof of the divine benevolence; as it might have suggested itself that we cannot but judge from what we feel and experience, and that if the Deity had shown himself less favourably disposed to his creatures here, they could have little ground to expect it hereafter.

BUT, though so kindly dealt with in our animal capacity, in what relates only to our present life, thanks ever due be given to our great Creator for that most important distinction, and mark of favour, which his kindness has farther bestowed upon us; that we can contemplate ourselves also as his creatures of an higher form; as rational and moral, capable of attaining the knowledge of him, the benevolent author of our being, and of recommending ourselves to his favour by pious grateful acknowledgements and by obedience to his will, in doing good to others, as he does good to us and to all; which is the highest perfection and bliss.

In this view of ourselves, although we come out of his hands more helpless and destitute at first, than  
other

other animals, this is amply supplied by the appointed instruments of our birth.

The mind, our distinguishing excellency, is at first a perfect blank, fitted and ready to receive whatever impressions may be made upon it; for which we are entirely dependent on those about us, and the circumstances in which we are placed: which accounts for the infinite diversity of characters that are in the world. Ever in action, which is the source of all our improvement, from our first coming into life, and in every stage of it, we are delighted in gaining continually new ideas, and powers, and knowledge of all kinds.

The several parts of our make, our appetites, passions, and affections, spring up gradually in us, as they are called forth, and their objects present themselves; all of them in themselves good and right, and necessary for our well-being and perfection, yet, without due restraint and regulation, capable of being perverted, and of misleading us; for which, Reason, the ruling faculty, is given, to guide us to private and public good.

Wholly the creatures of association and habit, our characters are insensibly formed by the instruction, conversation, and example of those we first mix with, and the things and scenes and persons to which we are accustomed, and among whom our lot is cast. And thus being from the first, and all along, the subjects of perpetual care and kindness and attention of  
parents.

parents and of those about us, our good affections are generated and excited: we are induced, we are prompted, we desire, we feel it right, to be kind to others, as others have been kind to us, and take pleasure in adding to their happiness.

As we grow up our wants constrain us still more, to seek the aid and assistance of others, and our social habit incline us not to live in solitude. Prompted also by nature to unite ourselves with a tender companion for life, a way is opened from the construction of one family to the union of many families together, and the formation of larger communities for security, comfort, and advantageous intercourse; and thence to the establishment of government and laws; which when built up and upheld by principles of equal liberty and the general good, are fruitful of the greatest blessings.

In the morning of life, at reason's earliest dawn, we are transported with the sight of verdant fields, and lawns, and their various peaceful inhabitants grazing on them, with those combinations of different objects, of hill and dale and groves, that present themselves in beautiful landscapes; heightened at the same time with the harmony and music furnished by the choristers of the woods and sky, rejoicing in their being, and calling upon us to join their song: the whole scenery together forcing upon the beholder, the joyous, venerable idea of a parent almighty Mind; a Power unseen, of wisdom and goodness without bounds, which framed, adjusted, and preserves the whole,

whole, worthy to be loved and adored by all; as Bloomfield, in his artless numbers, happily describes it,

There his first thoughts to Nature's charms inclin'd,  
Which stamps devotion on th' inquiring mind.

And indeed by the use of reason; the light within us, every attentive mind may, from the view of his works, as well know that there is a God, who made and governs the world; as he may know, by the use of his eyes and senses, that there is a Sun, which enlightens the earth, and by its warmth cherishes the growth of vegetables, and ripens the corn and fruits.

This natural light moreover teaches us, that as we owe our existence and all its blessings to our Maker's unmerited kindness and bounty, we should be odious monsters were we ever to fail in the gratitude, reverence and obedience, ever due to one so much above us, who shews himself so interested for us and desirous of our happiness. And as the frame and constitution, which he, who giveth every thing to all, has bestowed upon us, are also such, that we cannot be happy ourselves, without promoting, as much as possible, the happiness of our fellow-creatures; these plain intimations within, and interwoven in our very frame, of gratitude and love to God, and affection to our fellow-creatures, can be considered as none other than the voice of God within us;—his *secret voice*, by which he calls to the sons and daughters of men in all ages and countries, and teaches them their duty and the  
road



road to their own happiness ; as once, by an *audible* voice at Mount Sinai, he delivered his solemn commands to one people.

Thus are those primary duties of piety and benevolence engrafted in us, and provision is made for our happiness as rational beings. This is the law written in the hearts of those who have no written law to guide them. And thus has the cause of religion and virtue been kept up in the world, amongst all the rational creatures of God, and the means of virtue and holiness, of their present and future happiness, afforded to all : not the same means and advantages to all, but sufficient for every one who can attain to no other. For no more will be required of any, than the honest and faithful use and improvement of the talents and advantages given, be they more or fewer.

Photinus having ended, the company paused a while, absorbed in involuntary silence and reflection on what he had brought together, on the support and happiness of all sentient beings that we are acquainted with, from man down to the lowest worm.

Marcellinus standing up, thanked him for furnishing them with such an exquisite moral treat ; “ How natural,” exclaimed he, “ on such a prospect of the world we inhabit, for the pious mind to adopt those strains in which the Hebrew poets first led the way, inspired by the sublime subject, and called upon all nature to assist them in hymning and celebrating in their songs the common creator and benefactor :

“ Not only the young and old, and those of every  
age

age and class of the human race ; but all the irrational tribes of those who fill the air, and walk the earth, and creep on the ground, or that glide along the watery element ; the different families of living creatures, who in their different ways shew themselves, busy and cheerful and happy.

“ And, not satisfied with this tribute, still in bolder strains they invoke the mountains and hills and plains, and every tree and shrub that grows, to contribute their share of praise, for being made to afford shelter and delight to so many living beings, and for other numberless uses ;

“ Nay, they invite even summer and winter to join the general chorus of praise ; the changing seasons so necessary to the health of man and beast, the growth and preservation of each herb and fruit-bearing tree, and to the ripening of the fruits of the earth, by which the whole is sustained and filled with gladness”.

And though these holy men were not such deep philosophers as we boast ourselves to be, they hereby shewed that they had attained to the chief end of all true philosophy, in having learned to read and trace out in his works the hand and kindness of the One Supreme, the benevolent creator, and divine artist.

From these few instances produced by you out of the inexhaustible store that remains behind, we are able with satisfaction to see that the Creator loveth all his creatures, and has brought them all into life to bestow upon them a happiness suited to them.

But

But what still more concerns us : You have pointed out, and enabled us to discern from what simple principles, and by what easy natural processes, the rational, moral character is formed, and from primeval dust and clay, whence we were first taken, becomes capable of rising to some faint, though infinitely distant resemblance of the all good and all perfect Being.

Yet I fear that this will be regarded merely as beautiful theory; and these fine capacities of the rational nature thought to be bestowed in vain, and never likely to be brought to maturity, when we take a survey of the world at large, and scan what mankind have been in all ages, and still are, in a moral view. And I should be led almost to despair, if you, Photinus, were not to continue to give us your kind help to explore what the momentous subject will produce.

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### CONVERSATION III.

#### AT THEIR NEXT MEETING.

AFTER talking for some time together upon indifferent matters, Marcellinus turned the discourse, observing, that as Photinus had shewn to their entire satisfaction, that the animal creation below us, in all their infinite variety and gradations, most usefully  
filled

filled the places assigned them, and were happy therein as far as we could perceive and judge; and was going on to investigate and ascertain how far the same could be said of the human race, he thought that to do full justice to the subject, it would be necessary to take in the history of the origin of mankind as delivered in our sacred books; and as there were different opinions entertained about it, to have it in some measure settled among them, what credit was to be given to that most ancient history of all others, how it is to be understood, and what is to be gathered from it. Concerning these points, that the adjusting of them might not divert Photinus from pursuing his main subject, he should take the liberty to submit his own sentiments to them, which he had reason to believe were not much different from their own, as it was a matter that had often fallen in their way.

Now it seemed to be generally allowed, by those who had searched into, and were best qualified to form a right judgment concerning the cosmogony recorded in the entrance of the book of Genesis, that the account of things therein given had been handed down to Moses from the first parents of mankind, through the channel of Noah and his descendants; which, from the longevity of mankind at that period, would not need to pass through many hands; and their high importance would secure diligence and fidelity in the conveyance.

In the first three chapters of the book, we have the  
most

most momentous documents and information concerning the one true God, and sole creator of all things, his character, and that of his creature, man. We there learn, what we might presume to be the fact, that mankind were not left to themselves, to the investigations of reason, to spell out and acquire the knowledge of the Being that made them, and of their duty to him; which though attainable by their natural powers, would have been a matter of very slow operation and accomplishment; but that they received this knowledge directly from God himself; deriving from the same source, at the same time, the knowledge of language necessary for their intercourse with each other and with their Maker. From the facts and circumstances of the narrative, we have the most probable grounds on which to build these conclusions. But how this knowledge of a primitive language was instilled or acquired, it is needless to ask, as it seems impossible to find out.

And although men have differed, and will continue to differ, in their interpretations of the language and dress, in which these important truths are clothed and conveyed; namely; what is called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; the tree of life: the serpent's temptation, and his conversation with Eve; her eating of the forbidden fruit at his instigation, and giving it to Adam to eat, and the sentence passed upon the several offenders by their creator and judge: much of it undoubtedly couched in allegory and figurative expression; as also literally to be taken in other parts,

parts, which are at the foundation ; (see the reference to it, Mark x. 5, 6.) yet the moral instruction intended to be conveyed by the whole is not difficult to be understood ; and in this there has been a very general harmony and concurrence. That, for instance, there is one God, the maker of all things, and father of mankind, who formed them in his own image, their moral governor and judge ; who is desirous of their happiness, which can only be attained by their observance of the laws he has made known to them as a rule for their conduct, annexing rewards to their obedience, and threatening with punishment their transgressions.

I shall only add, that, not far from the entrance of Mr. Locke's " Reasonableness of Christianity as delivered in the Scriptures," is a specimen of the manner in which that judicious person was wont to interpret for himself the history of the fall of our first parents, which, I have no doubt, you think with me worthy of attention.

When Marcellinus had finished, Photinus immediately rising up, remarked, that he had not any doubt of their being all much satisfied with what had been now suggested concerning this most interesting narrative of the remotest antiquity. For his part, he could not but declare and acknowledge, that it would relieve him much in the task their partiality had imposed on him, to have such a foundation to proceed upon. With their leave then, he would begin, and remind them ; that having already shown, that man  
had

had a moral nature, in distinction from the animals around him, by which he was fitted for the supreme happiness arising from the knowledge and worship of God, the sovereign all-perfect Being, and from a resemblance to him in goodness; they were now to inquire whether man attains that happiness? and what his history teaches us in this respect?

In the Bible, the oldest and most authentic history of the world and of the human race, as far as it goes, we find our first parents placed originally in a most happy station, where obedience to their kind creator, in observing his laws, enjoined only for their good, was their easy duty. But they ungratefully failed in it; and, as they were forewarned, paid the penalty of their transgression; and, though not particularly informed of it, we may not doubt of their punishment having its intended effect, in producing repentance and future obedience.

The marks of human frailty did not, alas! stop with them. Dire selfish passions soon crept into their small family, and prompted their eldest son, the monster Cain, through envy, to take away the life of his more pious, virtuous brother. But fell remorse and misery speedily overtook him for the atrocious act. The shock which this would give to all that heard of it; and the lessons upon it which our first parents would not fail to read, of the fatal effects of headstrong ungoverned passion, would contribute to restrain others from a violation of their duty, and be remembered for good.

Of Enoch, one of the descendants of Adam before the flood, it is recorded, Gen. v. 24, that he *walked with God*, i. e. was one highly approved by him ; and *was not* ; for God took him. The phrase, *was not*, in itself implies, that *he died*, ceased to exist : but as explained by what follows, *for God took him*, it here denotes, that he was removed out of the world without dying. For so the word is rendered, Gen. v. 24, by the Greek translators : where also in the original Hebrew, the same term is used, which is afterwards in 2 Kings ii. 3, in speaking of Elijah being taken up alive into heaven. And this sense is confirmed by the apostle, Hebrews xi. v. *By faith Enoch was translated, that he should not see death ; and was not found, because God had translated him : for before his translation he had this testimony that he pleased God.*

This striking event was an absolute assurance to the antediluvians of a life after this, which could not fail of making the deepest impressions upon them ; and its taking place at this early period would be of infinite service in teaching them, that the virtuous and good, living and dying, were the peculiar care of heaven.

Very little is preserved to us concerning the generations of mankind before the flood. But we may presume from the circumstances of trial and difficulty in which human creatures are all placed, and their general behaviour under them, that there would always be a mixture of characters, good and bad, more or less at different times. For a while, the good  
would



would prevail, till by degrees they fell away, and others less virtuous and regular succeeded, and at length wickedness and violence, we learn, rose to such a height, that the almighty and merciful Being judged it expedient to destroy the whole race of men from off the earth, all, except one righteous man and his family.

This most awful judicial act, however, of his moral government was not executed without giving them warning of his design, and trying to reclaim and amend them. For we are informed in our sacred books, that for very many years Noah had a divine commission to warn that evil generation of the just judgments impending over them, and to labour to bring them off from their pernicious courses. Some, we may not doubt, would be wrought upon so as to have their evil dispositions changed and turned to God and goodness, whether by the pious remonstrances of Noah alone, or of others joined with him ; although it was not possible to stem the torrent of wickedness, which by the decrees of heaven brought on the destruction of that incorrigible race. Yet we cannot refrain from remarking, how in the midst of judgment the Almighty remembered mercy, in sweeping them away at once by a death the most easy of all others.

Thus did they suffer for their extreme wickedness, and violation of the divine commands ; and became the means of exalting the virtue of those, who affectionately and earnestly strove, though in vain, to

bring them to virtue and an obedience to the divine will.

It has not pleased the Divine Wisdom to gratify us with many things that we might have wished to know concerning Noah, the second father of our race: he that had seen the whole species cut off for their sins, and his family alone spared. How powerful and affecting so long as he lived must have been his testimony of the one true God and Maker of all things; of his goodness in bringing creatures into life to make them happy by an obedience to his laws; his just abhorrence of all sin and wickedness! This knowledge he would be careful to inculcate on his children and his children's children in a long succession. And that there was such important knowledge derived from this source, and circulated through all nations, is manifest from the accounts of the state of the world which are preserved to us.

After the flood, the re-peopling of the earth would be promoted by different families originating from Noah and his sons, which carried with them in their dispersions these great truths.

It is a noble attestation to the truth of the Mosaic history, which is given by sir Isaac Newton, in his "Chronology of ancient Kingdoms amended," by shewing its agreement with the actual state of the world and condition of its inhabitants, as exhibited in the imperfect accounts of them handed down to us. He thence observes, p. 188, "that the worship of the true God continued to the time of Abraham and Melchi-

Melchizedech, and that it was not till their days that men fell away to the worship of false gods, which were probably the heavenly host, the sun, moon, and stars; and that it was to avoid this, which then began in Chaldea, and spread from thence, but had not yet reached the land of Canaan, that Abraham left Ur of the Chaldeans, to go by Haran into the land of Canaan, being called out by Divine Providence from among his kindred, who were beginning to be infected with it; and this great author concludes the first chapter of his diligent and exact search into the Scriptures and antiquity, with this general deduction, p. 190. “So then, *the believing that the world was framed by one supreme God, and is governed by him; and the loving and worshipping him, and honouring our parents, and loving our neighbours as ourselves, and being merciful even to brute beasts, is the oldest of all religions.* He had just before called this *the primitive religion of Jews and Christians; which, adds he, ought to be the standing religion of all nations, it being for the honour of God and the good of mankind.*”

Hardly throughout all antiquity shall we find a more dignified and accomplished person than Abraham; of great wisdom and integrity; of a generous independent spirit, and true fortitude; famed over all the East for his virtues, and distinguished as a worshipper of the one true God, in which he carefully instructed his family and dependents; and in those days his known and avowed principles and example

must have been of service in discountenancing and restraining men from the worship of false gods, which was then beginning to be set up; and the more, as his travelling into different countries would cause him to be much inquired after and known.

Much to be noted is the account given by the sacred historian of Abraham's intercession with the Divine Being in behalf of the sinful inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha. This most probably passed in vision, whilst he was praying; (the like to which is recorded, in later times, of the devout Roman centurion, and of the apostle Peter, Acts x.) for just before it happened, Gen. xviii. 22, it is said, Abraham stood before God, *i. e.* was praying to him, as the phrase is understood by the best interpreters.

How edifying this first representation that is handed down to us, in the annals of the world, of a creature admitted to converse by prayer with his Creator! and what a pattern of devotion to us even in these enlightened times! Abraham requests nothing for himself; but with profound humility, moved by a benevolent concern for the most horrible crimes of his fellow creatures, he, by various arguments in their behalf, pleads for their being saved from impending destruction, that they might have space to repent. Whilst on the other hand, with infinite condescension and kindness, the Almighty listens and replies to his pleas, convincing him, that had not their dispositions been turned to evil beyond a possibility of being changed by any ordinary means, his prayer would

would have been granted, and they would have been spared.

With regard to the particular sin of the inhabitants of those cities, for which the divine judgments were ready to fall on them, and which this pious good man prayed might be averted; it is a crime which bespeaks the highest depravity, if not a total moral insensibility and alienation of mind from God and goodness. And it is probable that such an early declaration from heaven against it, in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire, the traces of which remain unto this day, displayed in so tremendous a manner before Abraham and his family; with the severe stigma and condemnation passed upon all such crimes afterwards, in the law of Moses: these circumstances, all together, fixed and left such a deep indelible impression and horror upon the minds of his chosen race, as have been the means of preserving them at all times from such unnatural debasing vice. For we never find their prophets, in the long catalogue of their crimes, laying this particularly to their charge. And in their dispersion into other countries, foretold by their prophets, whilst the heathens among whom they sojourned were many of them infamous for it, the Greeks and Romans in their most polished and improved state by no means excepted; and the followers of Mahomet horribly guilty, the nation of the Jews has in general been unpolluted with it.

Of Lot, the nephew of Abraham, it is recorded, *2 Peter ii. 6, 7, 8*, that he was filled with deep concern

cern for the extreme wickedness of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha, a mark of a truly virtuous mind, to be concerned for God and his holy laws, and the happiness of his fellow-creatures in their obedience to them. But concerning these distinguished persons, Noah, Abraham, and Lot, and some other worthy characters among the ancestors of the Israelites in those early ages, there are unquestionably some things recorded which are by no means to their credit, or to be imitated by us: a circumstance which does honour to the sacred historian, shewing him to be actuated by a regard to truth only in what he related, and resolved to tell things as they really happened, however it might make against some of the most favourite characters of his nation.

Of Moses, the divine lawgiver of the Israelites, and his early preference of virtue and obedience to God to the highest worldly dignities and enjoyment, we have an important testimony, Heb. xi. 24, 25, 26, confirmed by every thing we know concerning him. From the time that he had a divine call to deliver his countrymen out of bondage in Egypt, and to settle them in the land of Canaan, he led a life of incessant toil, and anxiety, and contradiction, in having to struggle with their low base minds, and obstinate untractable tempers, which their long slavery had generated and riveted in them; by which his patience and magnanimity were called forth and exercised; devoting himself and all his powers to bring them off from this slavery of vice and evil passions.

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the worst of all others : for which he had no reward to look for in this world, but the satisfaction of doing them good and approving himself to God.

His wisdom and virtues we find were known and revered far and near among the gentiles ; and the excellent laws which he laid down for his people, taught and excited many in different countries to honour the true God, and to be serviceable to their fellow creatures in bringing them from a rude and savage and immoral life to a subjection to laws for the public good.

No one can rise up from perusing the history of his life and times, as given us by himself ; the admirable laws and institutions he prescribed, to teach the Israelites the knowledge and worship of Jehovah, the one true God, and of him alone ; the laws for their living together in society, and promoting their mutual happiness, with the mighty works he was enabled to do in Egypt for the establishment of his divine mission, and for the emancipation of his countrymen, and to preserve them afterwards in their duty and obedience ; without seeing throughout the extraordinary hand and leading of God.

And it is against all credibility, that one, governed by such excellent principles ; exhibiting in all his actions such an example of true piety and goodness ; suggesting continually to his countrymen the great things God had done for them, appealing to them frequently at the time and upon the very spot, and exhorting them to gratitude and obedience on that account ;

account; should he under a delusion himself, or should in all this be acting a part and deceiving them. The mind revolts at the supposition: an unperverted understanding can need no other proof that Moses had a commission and authority from God to teach and to act as he did.

And in the same way of argument, it was not in the nature of things, if human beings were the same then as now, that the Israelites should be persuaded of their being delivered out of Egypt by a miraculous interposition from heaven in their favour, and of their being supported afterwards by the divine power in the wilderness; should continue to be assisted in the same extraordinary way in overcoming their enemies, by walls of defence (Joshua vi. 20, 21.) falling down before them; by rivers dividing (Joshua iii. 5, *to the end*) to make way for their passing them; that these and the like miraculous events in their favour should be the theme of their sacred songs and public hymns of thanksgiving to God their almighty deliverer at the time and ever after to this hour, and yet never to have really taken place, but to have been a mass of priestly and political contrivance; in which the whole nation combined or were imposed on, till in these later ages the imposition was discovered.

Assuredly those persons are true objects of pity, who, through some unfortunate bias on their minds, are led to reject a history of facts so well authenticated as those which have Moses for their author; which,



which, besides this most cogent internal proof now produced, is supported by all the external evidence which can reasonably be required ; for which Grotius and others may be consulted by all who are competent to make the research.

One is the more concerned for this incredulity, because the rejection of the important truths conveyed in these books, most commonly springs from a fixed determination not to admit any accounts, however well attested, of divine extraordinary communications and revelations to mankind ; by which they deprive themselves of the unspeakable satisfaction thereby afforded, that the world and all things in it, especially the moral world, have been from the first and are under the special government and direction of its Creator ; who appoints the different and successive advantages of light and knowledge, and means of virtuous improvement.

Indeed where any one, for instance, is persuaded, that Moses in his history ascribes to the Almighty what is inconsistent with his attributes of justice and goodness ; or introduces him as enjoining or giving encouragement to any thing vicious or immoral, or that is injurious to their fellow-creatures ; so long as he remains under this persuasion, and cannot be brought to see his error by the arguments laid before him, you can only be sorry for him, and wish him a mind more teachable and better informed.

With regard to the extermination of the Canaanitish nations, the great stumbling-block of the day,

and objection to the reception of Moses as a divine prophet and law-giver; and the particular command given by him not to spare infant children where a general destruction was to take place; it seems not to be needed to screen and justify it by a reference to the same thing taking place in the divine natural government, where whole districts, infants and grown persons, are promiscuously destroyed by earthquakes and the like; as this is a defence, which some are dissatisfied with, not holding the cases to be parallel. It was a sufficient justification for the thing, that there was the divine command for it; sufficient for all who believe in a God of all perfection and goodness, the moral governor of his creatures, and we can have no dispute with any others: for he can command nothing but what is beneficial and good to all, even to those who at present suffer by it. It is only necessary to be satisfied that it is his command, and we are to obey.

Now we have seen above, that there can be no ground to question the veracity of Moses, in what he so frequently declares, that it was the command of God to the Israelites by him, to exterminate those nations and take possession of their land, for that most important reason so often assigned, *lest they make thee sin against me.*

The Israelites also, besides the command of God given them by Moses, were further assured, from the divine extraordinary assistance vouchsafed to them in overcoming the Canaanites, that they acted by a divine

vine command in invading and taking possession of the country ; in which, without express encouragement from the Almighty, they would have been no better than robbers and murderers.

The Canaanites themselves also had notice and warning given them of what was coming upon them, and for what cause ; which is plain from what Rahab the hostess related to the spies whom she had concealed, Joshua ii. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. and what the Gibeonites afterwards declare to Joshua, ix. 3, &c. so that the body of the people were persuaded that the Israelites came against them by a commission from the supreme God and possessor of heaven and earth ; who in acting by his authority violated no law of nature, nor did any injury to the Canaanites in dispossessing them.

The severity, however, of these awful judgments upon these nations, for their extreme wickedness, of which the Israelites were made the instruments, was not in that degree or to that extent which has been supposed. This has been maintained, with great strength of argument, by learned and impartial judges ; Maimonides and others of the first account among the Jews ; and by very many Christians of our own and other countries, in particular by Grotius, who, on Deut. xx. 10, maintains that the law Exod. xxiii. 31, 32, 33, and Deut. vii. 1, 2, was to be extended only to such of these people as did not surrender themselves on being summoned ; as is evident from Joshua xi. 19, 20. Their being commanded to save  
alive

alive nothing that breatheth, Deut. xx. 16, is to be understood only in case they did not surrender when summoned, but rejected the conditions of peace offered to them.

But perhaps with regard to that extreme inhumanity and barbarity which is imputed to the Israelites, and supposed to be enjoined by Almighty God to be exercised upon the Canaanites to their utter extermination, the best refutation is the fact itself, that they were by no means all destroyed or exterminated; but were left and continued to dwell among the Israelites under their judges and their kings, even David himself; who certainly would not have permitted what was directly forbidden by God.

It is ever to be remembered, that it was not merely for their idolatry, though that alone be often named; but as it was connected with most abominable impure as well as inhuman rites, which made a part of it, and with which it was always accompanied, that these nations of Canaan were to be exterminated. For it is not for his own sake that the Almighty requires or declares himself to have pleasure in our religious worship and homage of himself alone and of no other besides him; but because it is necessary for our own perfection and happiness, and to keep us from falling into the grossest ignorance, bigotry, and superstition, and most cruel malignant dispositions to our fellow-creatures\*.

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\* See, in many parts of it, that last and most invaluable work,  
his

The expedience and need of this great severity against the idolatry of the Canaanites, to check and prevent its spreading, appeared from the proneness of the Israelites, and their continual relapsing into it under their judges and their kings, till their captivity in Babylon. And the honest unflattering account which their historians throughout give of their criminality in this respect, is a proof of the genuineness of their narratives, which must be agreeable to all lovers of truth, though they will lament the horrid degeneracy which they describe. But in the midst of it, in the worst times, there were many thousands who did not bow the knee to Baal; and even some of their princes had the virtue and the courage to attempt a reformation; and not a few among their prophets fell a sacrifice to their boldness and efforts to bring their countrymen off from their abominable vice and worship of their false gods. Heb. xi. 36—38.

During the many ages, whilst the Israelites were acting, some worthily, others much the contrary, under their greater light and advantages; among the rest of the nations, those especially who dwelt nearest and had intercourse with them, enjoyed the means of

his *Comparison of the Institutions of Moses with those of the Hindoos*, of my most beloved friend, Dr. Priestley. Although now far separated during this transitory life, on the verge of which we both stand, there is humble hope of meeting again when the sleep of death is over. His numerous works will continue to enlighten the world, till the only true God be more universally known; and the pure gospel of Jesus, his messenger, have its natural influence.

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becoming acquainted with the knowledge of the one true God; and must have benefited much by it, and also by observing the punishments which this people of God drew on themselves, by falling off to the impure rites and worship of false gods: and under their dispensation, and with their lesser light, many wise and excellent characters were formed, who laboured to do good and improve others.

Among these heathens there might be, and certainly there were, many distinguished patterns of excellence, who were blessings to mankind, although they met with no historian to hand down their merits and example to those that came after them. But we have undoubted records of one person, who shewed by his moral and intellectual acquirements, how far the light of nature could go, and what philosophy was able to effect. And it may serve to humble, and to shame us into a better conduct, to reflect how far we fall short of his attainments, and creep below him in moral excellence, many of us, in the midst of our blaze of light and advantages from divine revelation.

This was Socrates, the son of Sophroniscus, an Athenian statuary, bred to his father's profession, in which he practised for a while and excelled; but very soon applied himself wholly to the study of philosophy, principally that branch hitherto little cultivated, which related to the knowledge of nature and its author, and the duties men owed to him and to one another: he thus stood forth at once the most extraordinary example the world had ever yet seen, of de-  
voting

voting himself, his time, and talents, to instruct his fellow-citizens, and reform their lives and manners; with great simplicity addressing himself to all he met with to do them good; seeking no benefit for himself, nor ever taking money of the numerous scholars who attended him, as did other philosophers; contented to live in poor circumstances the better to promote his virtuous purposes, when, had he not refused them, he might have enjoyed great riches. In the midst of all, he discharged the duties of a good citizen; in time of war with singular courage and humanity in defence of his country; and at other times filling the different offices he was called to in his turn, in the commonwealth, with fidelity to his trust, and the most perfect disinterestedness.

His general manner was, with cheerfulness and pleasantry to join in conversation with those that fell in his way, when by apt and easy questions, without ostentation or pretences to superior wisdom, he sought to draw them forth, and lead them by degrees to the point he aimed at; which was to find out their own ignorance and defects, and to correct them.

In this work, for which he believed himself to have a divine call, he was unwearied; and going on in the same virtuous train, through the course of a long life, in the midst of obloquy and contradiction from many, but most highly revered and esteemed by others, he was at last put to death most unjustly, on the accusation of two of his fellow-citizens, whom he had exasperated by the severity of his rebukes.

This, however, would not have taken place, had not envy of his superior virtue, which they were afraid of, wrought upon his fellow-citizens and the people at large, to connive at such vile and iniquitous proceedings.

It is a very humiliating consideration, that in these most polished times of Greece, when science and philosophy were at their highest summit, nothing effectual was done to diminish or put an end to the grossest public idolatry, in the worship of gods who had been men and women of infamous characters ; but grave magistrates and philosophers, even Socrates among the rest, were seen promiscuously frequenting their temples, and joining the common herd of their worshippers. The indiotment, however, under which he suffered, may seem to imply the contrary. It was in this form : "Socrates violates the law in not believing the gods which the state believes, but introducing other new gods. He violates likewise the law in corrupting the youth. The punishment death." And he certainly was not guiltless of this charge. For in his public lectures, and general intercourse with his fellow-citizens, he frequently took occasion to shew the absurdity of the popular belief, in pointing to the scandalous histories of their gods and goddesses, endeavouring to instil juster sentiments of the deity into their minds ; to which his prosecutors, in their accusation of him, plainly alluded : so that he unquestionably died a martyr to his zeal for virtue, and against the worship of false gods.

Here



Here Volusian interposing, begged leave to say, that he believed few venerated that incomparable person more than himself; but he was apprehensive that so high a testimony of him as that just now given, would not easily pass, unless some further apology were made for him, for his appearing to dissemble his better knowledge, and giving countenance, by frequenting it, to the worship of their gods, whose characters and examples he must have detested. It is a very severe sentence, which a learned and worthy man \* has passed upon him in this respect, where he observes, “ It has been pleaded in behalf of Socrates, and other philosophers, that though they have attended on the idolatrous worship in the heathen temples, they still retained the knowledge and belief of the one true God, and perhaps worshipped him in their closets and in their thoughts. If this be fact, proceeds the same author, then it must be supposed, that these are the very men whom the apostle speaks of as *holding the truth in unrighteousness*, i. e. imprisoning, suppressing, and concealing in their own minds, in an unrighteous manner, that knowledge of the true God, to which they had attained by the contemplation of his works. *Against such, the apostle saith, the wrath of God is revealed.* Rom. i. 18.”

This was advanced in the heat of controversy,

\* *A Defence of a Discourse on the Impossibility of proving a future State by the Light of Nature*, p. 100, 101. By Joseph Hallet, junior. London, 1731.

which

which seldom allows us to judge with calmness and equity. It may be alleged, however, in defence of the conduct of Socrates, that the worship of the one God, and of none other besides him, might not appear of that consequence to him, which it most justly does to us Christians, and to the Jews, who have the benefit of divine Revelation. He might also think it better for his countrymen to have some religion, however corrupt, than to be wholly without any; and might hope, that his unceasing labours to combat their errors and prejudices, and throw light into their minds, especially those of the rising generation, and to guard them against superstition; would in time lead to purer sentiments of God and religion; and that the seed he had taken such pains to sow, would come up and bear fruit.

But his principal defence must be rested on this; that he did not use any compliances in the worship of the gods of the country, out of any mean views to his own interest, or safety, or from any other unworthy motive; but purely for the good of his fellow-citizens, the better to bring them to truth and virtue; which appeared by his calm fortitude and noble manner of voluntarily giving up his life at last, when he might easily have retained it: than which nothing more edifying is to be found in all heathen antiquity.

In the interval that followed, during the bright days of Greece and Rome for the space of 400 years, trial was made what was the utmost effect of that  
light

light which had been lent to mankind, whether as derived by tradition from our first parents; or, when that grew faint and dim, what was farther struck out, by their natural powers and the improvements of science, to meliorate the condition and reform the manners of the human race, and lead them to virtue and the true knowledge of God.

What progress was made in these respects is to be gathered from the historians and writers that have come down to us, Cicero more especially, who flourished towards the close of this period, and was the best man of those trying times in which he lived, and the finest moral writer, as well as the most enlightened, before the world was illumined by the Gospel.

By him, and by all that had gone before him, who filled the first stations in their different commonwealths, and who wished well to mankind, the character of Socrates was held in the highest veneration and invariably commended; but no one had the courage to follow his example. The utmost reformation aimed at was the introduction of wiser plans of government, for the preservation of good order and the peace of society. Nothing was done to put men upon attending to the inward principle of their actions, and amending their dispositions, in which all true virtue consists. Nothing could even be expected to be attempted of a public nature to recover men to the knowledge of the true God and their obedience to him, whilst the public religion, every where, in all countries,

tries, consisted in the adoration of gods, who had been mortal men, guilty of great crimes and immoralities, and whose worship was carried on by rites and ceremonies of the most profligate nature, which decency forbids to name; and to which the bulk of the people in all countries were immoderately attached.

The season now approached, when, as Paul tells the Athenians, the maker and governor of all things, who had at no time failed to cherish and support all his rational offspring, of which he was the common parent; having hitherto left the heathen world to themselves, and to the guidance of their natural powers and faculties, which ought in all reason to have led them to God and their duty to him, and to each other; did now, in the councils of his sovereign wisdom, judge proper not to suffer them to go on any longer in their own ways, without warning them of their departure from their allegiance to him, and from their true happiness. *The times of this ignorance,* says the apostle, *standing in the midst of the court, where cognizance was taken of such matters, God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath fixed a day in the which he will judge the world according to justice, by a man whom he hath appointed; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.* Acts xvii. 30, 31.

A new æra was now to commence among the rational creatures of God; to all of whom, every where,  
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this his solemn decree and command was to be made known by the preaching of the Gospel.

Men were not now to rest in any lesser attainments in virtue ; but to aim at the highest excellency, a resemblance in goodness to the Divine Being himself. For this is what the great teacher lays down, and which he exemplified in all his actions ; a finished pattern of piety and goodness in a creature, beyond which our highest ideas cannot go. Matth. v. 44, 45. *I say unto you, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you ; that ye may be the children of your father which is in heaven, for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust.* When he immediately adds ; *For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye to expect ? Do not even the publicans the same ? and if ye salute your brethren only, what do you more than others ? Do not even the publicans so ?* As though he had said ; The most selfish will take pains to do good, and to serve others, whilst they find their present account and advantage in it. But a different conduct was required, a more sublime morality was prescribed to his followers. Whatever suffering or injurious usage they might meet with from others, they were not to be hindered thereby from doing them all the good in their power ; and they were to make it their business to promote the virtue, the present and future happiness of their fellow-creature, at the risque of their own ease and comfort,

comfort, and even, when duty called them, of life itself.

Efforts like these, according to their different situations, opportunities, and abilities, are indispensably bound upon all Christians, without exception. This was the new doctrine promulged from heaven, holding forth the supreme love of God the common creator and benefactor, manifesting itself in the love of their fellow-creatures, and seeking their good as their own, as the sum and substance of all human duty and of all true religion, and leading to the highest perfection and happiness.

Most conspicuous were the happy effects of the Gospel at first, in reforming the lives of those in every country who received it: and if mankind had been contented with it, as delivered by its first great teacher, it is not too much to say, that long before this day the whole world would have been won over to embrace it. But when it became perverted from its genuine simplicity; and to proselyte men to the belief of certain opinions was held the chief point, and not to convert them from vice to virtue and a good life, it soon began to lose its salutary efficacy upon the minds of men; and though multitudes continued to be added to the number of its professors, they did not become better men in practice.

Endless disputes and quarrels about their several superstitious notions, and inventions in religion, grafted on the Gospel, soon filled them with rancour and implacable animosities against each other, which  
often

often proceeded to bloodshed ; and they lost what was most valuable in religion, their charity towards each other, whilst contending for shadows. And in the course of a few centuries, and at the beginning of the seventh, Christians were become not only most horribly depraved in moral practice, and sunk into the most abject superstition ; but had multiplied to themselves so many different objects of worship, the mother of Christ and other dead persons, called Saints, male and female ; a trinity of three persons in God, instead of the single person of the God and father of the universe, the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of all mankind ; that to preserve this most important doctrine from being overwhelmed and lost in *Christian* idolatry, as also to punish Christians for their neglect and abuse of the superior light they enjoyed, the Divine Providence seems to have permitted the Arabian impostor Mohammed to succeed in his ambitious designs, and in spreading his new religion over a great part of the globe. This new religion he professed to build upon the foundation of the Divine Unity, as taught by Moses, and by Jesus Christ, which was, as he too justly maintained, entirely corrupted and abandoned by the followers of the latter. And some respectable historians, who are disposed to be candid towards this extraordinary person, relate, that he at first set out under serious impressions, and sincere concern of mind at the prevalence of idolatry among his countrymen the Arabians, as well as the Christians universally.

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That he should afterwards take such a horrible way to put down idolatry, and to propagate the knowledge and worship of one God only, by the sword and utter destruction, where any refused or hesitated to embrace his new religion when proposed to them, was to proclaim immediately the falsehood of his own pretensions to be a prophet from God, to all who had any right discernment what God is. For it is impossible that a Being, in whom dwelleth the most perfect truth and goodness, can be pleased with, or approve the compelling of his mistaken and misjudging creatures to abandon their errors concerning himself by outward force and intimidation; for these can only produce a feigned assent, and not real conviction, which can alone be brought about by argument and persuasion.

Most unhappy have been the effects of this violence against their fellow-creatures on account of differences in religion, this intolerant and anathematizing spirit against Christians as idolaters, taught and enjoined by this false prophet to his followers. Thus planted and rooted in them, as a principal part of their religion, it has from the first inspired them every where, who are computed to make one-third at least of the habitable world, with the most bitter hatred and enmity to all that bear the name of *Christian*, considering them as idolaters, and hated of God; so as in general even to refuse them the common offices of humanity on that account, and to afford them no better appellation than that of *dogs*, and treat them  
with



with all manner of indignity, where they have no further power to hurt them. Of which temper, at this very day, Mr. Mungo Park has lately given us some curious facts.

For many ages after Mohammed, his successors, by the furiousness of their zeal to propagate his religion and put down idolatry, were the instruments of Providence in inflicting the most dreadful calamities upon Christians, which were observed to fall on those countries where the grossest corruptions of religion had prevailed; in Greece and in the eastern parts of the Roman empire; and in the progress of their arms and success, they seized and possessed themselves of many of the countries they conquered. So that in the councils of heaven, and according to the methods of the divine government, by which nations as well as individuals are often observed to be deprived of the light and advantages which they slight and misuse, these fierce invaders were permitted nearly to extinguish the light of the Gospel, in many places where it had been successfully preached and planted by the apostles of Christ, and they strove to establish by force the doctrine of their false prophet in its room; where, among those of them who unhappily embraced it, it remains to this day, in all the darkness, imbecility, narrowness, and cruelty, which such intolerance in religion naturally engenders, and in which it must ever terminate.

Photinus here pausing a little, Volusian with some emotion started up, crying out, What shall we say,

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Photinus,

Photinus, to the system of religion which you have been exhibiting, pretending to come from God, when its first article is a direct violation of the laws of nature and of God, in compelling men by force to acknowledge and worship him?

Assuredly these horrible effects shew the pretended prophet who teaches such a doctrine, not to be of God, but *the angel of the bottomless pit*, of the infernal regions, as Mohammed and his successors are described, Revelation ix. 11.

Behold here the fatal consequences of forcing the consciences of men. So far from being of service in bringing them to piety and virtue, and a due reverence for and obedience to that Almighty Being, the one only God, for whose honour Mohammed and his followers profess to be particularly zealous and concerned, we may appeal to the experience and testimony of twelve hundred years (for so long this religion has been widely spread and established), whether its numerous converts, instead of becoming wiser, and better, and happier thereby in any degree, have not been made far worse in all these respects, and at some times, and in some places, more abominably vicious and addicted to the vilest passions, and lying heavier upon the peace and happiness of their fellow creatures, and more hostile and cruel towards them, than if they had been without any religion, or belief of God at all?

Yet it becomes not Christians to condemn Mohammedans for their intolerance and cruelty, in forcing  
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the consciences of other men, or to throw the first stone at them on that account. For the spirit of domination over the minds and consciences of others ; of dictating to them what they were to believe to obtain the favour of God ; and of punishing them in various ways, by loss of fame and of worldly substance, by bodily tortures, imprisonment, loss of liberty and life at last, if they did not comply and submit to them, began early amongst Christians, as soon as they were permitted to assume a temporal authority over their brethren ; and has continued to this hour.

To what a degree it took place in the great churches of the East and West, and their numerous dependencies, need not to be named : all ecclesiastical history is full of it. At the Reformation, those countries which separated themselves from the church of Rome, and relinquished some of its errors, retained this the greatest of all, a tyranny over the consciences of their fellow Christians. It is to be lamented, that the different congregations of Protestants among ourselves, whether those endowed by the state, or dissenters from the establishment, have not yet learned, that other Christians are equally entitled to the favour of God with themselves, though they should apprehend differently of the Divine Being, and of the person and character of Christ, and of many other points of his religion, whilst they endeavour to the best of their power to understand and practise what Christ taught.

How desirable to find a cure for this disgrace of

the Christian name, the narrowness, contempt, and hatred and jealousies of Christians of different sentiments towards one another! The allowance of no power, emolument, credit or advantage whatsoever, to persons for being of one opinion in religion more than another, would do much towards healing these selfish base passions; when it would be of no worldly benefit to them, to be of one church, or of one religious opinion, more than another.

But it would go farther to remove the root of the evil, if we could but prevail with and induce men to see and consider, that there is no foundation in scripture, or reason, though it is ignorantly taken for granted, that *Christians only can be saved*; that *they alone will obtain the favour of God and eternal life*. For this doctrine, wherever embraced, leads Christians to extravagant and over-high opinions of themselves, and uncharitable conclusions concerning others. It tends to make them put an undue importance upon the mere belief of Christianity; to conceit that they are the favourites of Heaven solely for embracing it; and that it is meritorious to bring men over to their religious opinions, though they become not more virtuous by it. And what is worst of all; this appropriating of salvation to themselves, to their own church or sect or party, makes them of course uncharitable towards all those who do not hold with them in opinion, or who oppose their sentiments; and in the end leads them to persecute others and to do them all manner of harm, as enemies and opposers of God  
and

and his truth. This is what we see every day exemplified.

The real state of the matter is this. It is an inestimable privilege and happiness to be born within the sound of the gospel; where we have the means and opportunities of informing ourselves of its truth, and of enjoying and profiting by those powerful motives and assistances which it affords.

But those who are not so happy as to enjoy these advantages; who live where the gospel is not known; or where it is so perverted and corrupted, that instead of inviting men, it alienates their minds from it, their ignorance, or aversion even to Christianity under such circumstances will not be imputed to them; and they will only have to give an account of the right use of the light and talents and advantages they shall have received. And in this conclusion I am persuaded you will all agree with me, that in teaching Christ's religion, we should never teach young persons in particular, nor indeed teach any persons, that Christians only can be saved; much less Christians only of this or that particular church or sect; but that all persons will be saved, who are made pious and good by their religion; and none else.

You have gratified us all, when Volusian had ended, immediately replied Photinus, in giving such an exact though frightful picture of that religion which the Almighty seems to have permitted for the trial and punishment of corrupt Christians; and in pointing  
out

out the unhappy resemblance which Christianity bears to some of its worst features. It remains now, however, to go on with our subject, and to remark, that on the taking of Constantinople in the year 1453; and putting an end to the empire of the East, by this destructive power, of which we have been largely speaking, a new and better prospect of things opened on these western parts, through the dispersion of many learned Greeks, and the revival of literature by their means; and a spirit of free-inquiry with it, cherished and brought forward by the providential discovery of the art of printing about that period.

Noble efforts were made by many excellent persons among Christians, at the hazard and sometimes with the loss of life, to revive and restore the knowledge and worship of the one true God, and vindicate the unalienable right of all men to judge for themselves of the things of God, of the duty they owed him, and the worship they were to pay him, without any dictatorial authority or interference of the priest or magistrate. And by the continuance of these efforts and the immortal writings of many for these last 300 years, in different countries, much has been done: the rights of conscience and of private judgment have been clearly demonstrated and generally acknowledged; but never, never fairly and really admitted and allowed by any of the great civil and ecclesiastical powers, who have been universally combined against them.

The subjects of a mighty neighbouring state did  
indeed

indeed some few years since, on principles at first approved by the liberal and good, set up their just claims to those natural rights of which for ages they had been deprived: and happy would it have been for them and for many, if they had adhered to and not stepped beyond their first righteous demands. In their deviation from them, and the dreadful scenes which have ensued, they have brought an undeserved stain and disgrace on the cause of liberty, and of the just rights of man, in which they first stood up and were engaged. And as is the wayward disposition of mankind, and frequent course of human affairs, they have been the cause of alarming many out of their calm and equal judgment, and of throwing them into the unhappy extreme of a dread of all just reform; and have thus become the means, for a time, of extinguishing light and truth.

Yet most justly as these sad excesses and many of their atrocious consequences are to be deplored, we can see great good resulting from the evil; in the abolishing of no small portion of baneful superstition, through the whole vast dominions of the French and their dependencies; especially in the prohibition of carrying about in procession, in the streets and on the Highways, and requiring every passenger to bow down to and adore, the wafer god; or breadden god; *Deum panarium*, as honest old Whitby scrupled not in derision to call it, in James II's days; that most gross *debasement* of the Divine Being, which, with other things of the sort and kin to it in the popish worship, was the legitimate

legitimate parent of that atheism with which the French nation hath been branded, and which some of its noble emigrants are said to have imported into the British dominions.

But the most desirable blessing which divine Providence hath brought out of these dreadful evils, has been the putting an utter end to all temporal power whatsoever in religious men, leaving them no authority whatever over others to promote religion, but that which alone belongs to it, of argument and persuasion.

From this short glance (for it can be called nothing better) of man, and of his moral state and condition from the beginning, which this present sitting hath afforded us, some idea may be collected of the progress and moral attainments for which he was principally made. And though the little effect of genuine virtuous principle, and the defective knowledge of God, have shewn themselves, and still too much appear, in the wars almost continually waging between nation and nation; and in the hatred and animosities on account of difference of religious sentiments; yet it would be unfair and unjust, in the most sceptical, not to admit that knowledge and virtue have been upon the whole progressive, and that very many eminent examples of both have been formed and are forming, in every age and country.

Photinus here pausing a little to make some apology for his discourse running out to so unavoidable  
a length,



a length, expressed his apprehensions that the account that had been given of the moral state of the world from the beginning, might be thought to exhibit too humiliating a picture of man placed at the head of the Creator's works here below, by those who looked for perfection all at once in every thing that comes from him. But as we are convinced that a Being of all goodness has in fact appointed otherwise; and as we certainly do not love our fellow-creatures, or desire their improvement and happiness, more earnestly than he that made them, and his wisdom can best judge and direct how to attain that happiness, we may probably, on a more particular examination, find the methods he has actually chosen fully suited to and likely to answer this end, though we may not so immediately see it.

For it is ever to be attended to, that, as far as we know or can judge, rational creatures could not become permanently happy as their Maker intends them to be, without the exertion of their own voluntary powers, by learning virtue and obedience to his will, ever their truest happiness, in the midst of temptations and difficulties to thwart and oppose, and even at times to mislead them. This may account for our coming out of his hands at first, weak and frail creatures, wholly unformed; the good or evil of our characters not born with us, but acquired afterwards, by a proper use, or the contrary, of the powers, faculties, capacities, and means of improvement bestowed upon us. And all are brought into life in situations and

circumstances, in which, in different degrees, they are taught what makes for their true happiness.

We are also, all of us, under the divine moral government, whether we attend to it or not. If we indulge ourselves to excess in the gratification of our appetites, disease and suffering are in general the consequence; and these tend to correct and restrain us in future. The selfish and ambitious lose all that bliss and calm enjoyment which arise from virtue and a sense of the divine favour, and are seen sometimes to fall the victims, even in this life, to those excruciating tortures, which sooner or later overtake all those who have accustomed themselves to make light of human misery, and to slight and neglect the various ways and means in their power of doing good to others.

And we are so formed, that the more we lay ourselves out to relieve the bodily wants and miseries of others, or to throw light into their dark minds, and bring them to God and goodness, the more desirous we are of being so employed, and delighted with it; so as to think the day lost in which we have not had an opportunity of thus serving and being useful to our fellow-creatures.

It has also been noted as a mark of the care and attention of Heaven for the virtuous improvement of mankind, that in all times the general sentiment has been in favour of the highest instances of virtue and goodness, and gross impiety and immorality excite horror, and have been ever stigmatized with infamy:  
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these sentiments being universal, can only have proceeded from the dispositions imbibed by all from the circumstances in which they are brought into the world, and which are all of divine appointment. Hence from the most antient times of which we have any record, it has been held a duty for men to sacrifice their lives for the good of others; to save their country, for instance, from imminent danger; and particularly to deliver it from slavery, which is worse than death, as it takes away and extinguishes all excitement to whatever is excellent. Such examples have ever been applauded; and to have regarded life, when by hazarding it they could have been of such eminent service to others, would have been held the utmost disgrace.

It is to be deplored, that the practice of mankind has not kept pace with their better principles; and that they have not had the fortitude to resist the various temptations to evil, which by degrees have drawn many on to the commission of crimes, by which human life has sometimes been rendered a scene of misery and confusion. Yet in the midst of all, it must give infinite satisfaction, that the balance has been always greatly on the side of virtue and goodness. We are shocked with indeed, and know not how to reconcile, the horrid scenes which present themselves before our eyes, at particular junctures, especially in times of war and civil commotions. But we can as little form a true judgment of

of the moral state of men from what passes at such seasons, as we can decide of the health and salubrity of a country in the time of a raging infectious fever. In the ordinary course of things, in quiet times, the less frequent instances of cruelty, fraud, and oppression, and other evils, (which will in some degree always be going on, and cannot entirely be prevented,) will be counterbalanced by a general friendliness and probity, and mutual kind endearments and services. And in all places, it must be confessed, the bulk of mankind are and have ever been employed in useful labours for their families, and in doing good offices to others, their friends, neighbours, and acquaintance, and in giving or procuring relief and assistance where needed, and in a thousand beneficent actions.

As this, however, is very much a matter of experience and observation, whether there be a preponderance of moral good in the present state, or not; I shall beg leave to produce a testimony in favour of it, from an eminent person of great learning and knowledge of the world, who might be supposed to be biassed to the other side of the argument by the prejudices of his profession, and shall read it to you as I find it published by Dr. Law, the late Bishop of Carlisle, with approbation. Thus then speaks Dr. King, Archbishop of Dublin, some time after the beginning of the last century, to an anonymous opponent, who had said, "that the prevalence of wickedness,

edness, or moral evil, was a thing so certain, that he was confident no one could have the least doubt of it, and he durst say, that the author himself believed it."

"The author professes himself to be of a quite different opinion," replies the archbishop. "He firmly believes, and thinks he very well comprehends, that there is much more moral good in the world than evil. He is sensible there may be more bad men than good, because there are none but do amiss sometimes, and one ill act is sufficient to denominate a man bad. But yet there are ten good acts done by those we call bad men for one ill one. Even persons of the very worst character may have gotten it by two or three flagrant enormities, which yet bear no proportion to the whole series of their lives. The author must profess, that among such as he is acquainted with, he believes that there are hundreds that would do him good for one that would do him hurt; and that he has received a thousand good offices for one ill one. He could never believe the doctrine of Hobbes, that all men are bears, wolves, and tigers to one another; that they are born enemies to all others, and all others to them; that they are naturally false and perfidious; or that all the good they do is out of fear, not virtue. Nay, the very authors of that calumny, if their own characters were called in question, would take all possible pains to remove the suspicion from them; and declare that they were speaking of the vulgar, of the bulk of mankind, and not of themselves. Nor in reality

reality do they behave in this manner towards their friends and acquaintance; if they did, few would trust them. Observe some of those who exclaim against all mankind for treachery, dishonesty, deceit, and cruelty; and you will find them diligently cultivating friendship, and discharging the several offices due to their friends, their relations, and their country; with labour, pain, loss of goods, and hazard of life itself; even where there is no fear to drive them to it, nor inconvenience attending the neglect of it. This you will say proceeds from custom and education. Be it so. However, the world then has not so far degenerated from goodness, but the greater part of mankind exercise benevolence, nor is virtue so far exiled as not to be supported and approved; praised and practised, by common consent, and public suffrage, and vice is still disgraceful. Indeed we can scarce meet with one, unless pressed by necessity, or provoked by injuries; who is so barbarous and hard-hearted, as not to be moved with compassion, and delighted with benevolence to others; who is not delighted to shew good-will and kindness to his friends, neighbours, children, relations; and diligence in the discharge of civil duties to all; who does not profess some regard for virtue, and think himself affronted when he is charged with immorality. If any one take notice of his own or another's actions for a day together, he will perhaps find one or two blameable, the rest all innocent and inoffensive. Nay, it is doubtful whether a Nero or Caligula, a Commodus

or

or Caracalla (though monsters of mankind, and prone to every act of wickedness and fury), have done more ill than innocent actions through their whole lives\*.”

These just observations on the general character and conduct of men shew, that far from being altogether wicked and worthless, they are such as in their first state might be expected, from their frail and imperfect frame, and the good and evil influences to which they are subject; liable to fall by yielding to the various temptations to which they are exposed; and on the other hand, by nobly resisting them, capable of being carried forwards to that which is most excellent.

And thus the wisdom and goodness of the Creator are vindicated; that he has not made mankind in vain; that he was not disappointed in this the noblest work of his creation here below; and that in the dangerous trials and difficulties to which it was necessary to expose his rational offspring, as they could not in any other way become virtuous and happy as he intended them to be, while many fell away for the present, many also cleaved to truth and goodness, and became purified and confirmed therein; and the world has been from the first and all along, a nursery for virtuous, noble, and useful characters.

\* Essay on the Origin of Evil, by William King, Archbishop of Dublin, translated from the Latin, with notes, by Edmund, Bishop of Carlisle (p. 388). The fifth edition, revised. London, by Faulder. 1781.

The company after some general conversation, and appointing a day for the further discussion of these subjects, now separated.

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#### CONVERSATION IV.

WHEN the party was next assembled, Marcellinus desired to express his satisfaction in the progress made in the disquisition before them. It was most pleasing, he said, to see it so clearly made out, that mankind were far from being so miserable or wicked as they were commonly presumed to be, and that the contrary was rather the truth and the fact. But clouds and darkness still hung over the prospect, through which he should be glad to see some light appear. The road through life, which many of the human species were destined to tread, was so dismal and dreary, along such dreadful passages of pain and misery, as to make one shudder at the thought of it; and the dispositions and habits were so depraved, malignant, horridly selfish, cruel, and vicious, which many were seen to carry out of the world with them, that some better solution than had yet appeared was earnestly to be wished for, how such a constitution of things could have its origin from, or be compatible with, a benevolent principle.

If these evils and disorders were to be attributed, as  
some



some philosophers have maintained, to the rugged untractable nature of matter, or of whatever it be, of which we are composed, and that it was through this or some other unavoidable impediment, and not from want of good-will in our Creator, but of power to execute to the full his benevolent purposes, that we were made subject to such harsh conditions of existence, which was said to have been, for some time, the opinion of the late enlightened friend of his country and mankind, Mr. Day \*, though he afterwards relinquished it, and embraced juster sentiments of the divine power and goodness :

Or if, as revelation has been thought to inculcate, it was owing to some powerful evil being, whose interference in the affairs of mankind was unavoidable, that we were exposed to such a variety of sufferings and temptations, and oft-times misled to ruin by yielding to them : in either of these cases we must submit, and make the best of what we cannot avoid or amend.

But all gloom would vanish and day-light disclose its beautiful rays, if it could be shewn with such evidence as might satisfy the rational mind, that the great whole of things is in such sort from God ; that natural and moral evil, pain and suffering, sin and wickedness, are all of his appointment, and permitted for good ; he could then cheerfully acquiesce and rest contented, whatever came to pass, secure that we were in the best hands ; and that however sad and disastrous at

\* Author of *Sandford and Morton.*

times, and in some particular cases, appearances were; all was for the best, and would in the result turn out favourable and happy. This was the great difficulty; the Gordian knot, which he almost despaired of ever seeing untied.

Photinus, here, who had been observed to be more than ordinarily attentive and wrapt in thought, whilst Marcellinus was speaking, suddenly rose up, and with greater earnestness and solemnity than he was accustomed to; "Be assured, my friends, says he, that we do not any of us deem so highly of the boundless mercy and goodness of the sovereign Creator and Parent of all things, as his works, and dealings with us and with all his creatures call for and demand, or we should entertain more exalted thoughts of him, and live under his government with a more uninterrupted joy and confidence than we seem to do, so as not to admit any the least doubt or mistrust that his goodness will in the end bear down every opposition.

For what do we behold, every where and in all things, but marks and tokens of wise contrivance and intentions of kindness for the creatures he has made; and also at the same time, plain indications, that if any comfort or satisfaction be denied or withdrawn from them that might minister to their present happiness; or pain and misery inflicted in the severest degree, it has been for good? These his kind intentions and beneficence to the whole sentient inferior creation, throughout the planet we inhabit, we have lately seen exemplified by a large induction of particular

cular instances, which might be extended without bounds, and which posterity in their investigations will take pleasure in enlarging throughout all future ages, and literally never be able to exhaust.

And with regard to his rational creation, formed in the image and likeness of their great Creator, and to be happy, may we presume to speak it, with his own happiness; always remembering that such is the frame and constitution bestowed upon us, that our true happiness cannot be a thing infused into us, but must arise from our own voluntary exertions and labour, in surmounting difficulties in our way, and acquiring those tempers and dispositions wherein it consists, and by which it is confirmed and must be perpetuated; namely, the dispositions of a supreme love to Him who gave us our being and all our powers, and an invincible affection to all our fellow-creatures and to all to whom our good offices can extend; which effects, the moral discipline we are put under, however painful and severe, from our own passions and the world without us, is exactly calculated to produce:

These facts being established; and taking along with us, that this happiness, for which we were made, the highest of which we or any created nature are capable, is a happiness which alone is permanent and for ever increasing:

It seems a solid foundation of reasoning, on which we may safely rely, that as the universe and all things in it are the work of a Being of infinite wisdom and  
power,

power, and of the most perfect goodness, and calculated for the best purposes, the happiness of the things he has made; and as there was nothing to over-rule him in his operations, or to induce or compel him to adopt any measures for accomplishing his kind designs, but such as he judged the most proper and suitable :

Therefore, as he has placed us in a world, wherein, though happiness greatly preponderates, there is such a mixture of pain and suffering, of vice and misery, as fills us often with melancholy apprehensions and dismay; we may be fully persuaded, that such a discordant, revolting mixture would not have been admitted into his fair creation, but because he saw it necessary for its perfection, and the fulfilment of his benevolent purposes; or rather, because those purposes could not be obtained without it: for, most assuredly, he would not have chosen evil on its own account, the misery and defilement of his creatures, but for the good that he saw would be derived from and procured by it.

And what we thus argue from the character and perfections of the Deity, manifested in his works; that evil, natural and moral, pain and suffering, vice and misery, were only admitted by him on account of the superior good accruing from them, not otherwise to be obtained; we also find to be true in fact and by experience.

For, if there had been no moral evil or wickedness,  
mankind

mankind would have been destitute of those dispositions and virtues which are their highest perfection, and the source of their purest happiness. Where would have been patience and forgiveness of injuries ; where the godlike disposition of returning good for evil, if there had been no fraud, or cruelties, or oppression exercised ?” “ Had the good and virtuous of mankind been wholly prosperous in this world,” says an excellent person ; “ had goodness never met with opposition, where had been the trial, the victory, and the crown of virtue ?” It is by a resistance to the alluring enticements to unlawful gratification of the inferior appetites and passions, and resolutely turning away from fascinating pleasure, that habits of temperance, chastity, and a virtuous self-denial are acquired. If, by stifling that kind, mutual affection which is nature’s dictate to all, we had not become eager to grasp every advantage to ourselves, seeking only our own indulgence by every means, ambitious, envious, unjust, trampling upon the rights and happiness of other men, impatient of rebuke and contradiction, revengeful, unawed by any fear of God, and his just awards ; there would have been no dangers to encounter with ; no hardships nor miseries, no persecutions in the cause of truth and virtue to endure ; no conflicts between an unswerving integrity and honesty on the one hand, and a compliance with the mean views of interest and worldly greatness on the other ; and we should have wanted those noble examples of undissembled piety, of meekness, fortitude, magnanimity,

nimity, disinterested zeal for and pursuit of the public good, not of one nation, but of all mankind, which have stimulated the good in all ages to the like virtuous exertions and attainments. So that, as it has been justly said of natural evil, pain, diseases, and the like, in vindication of the divine goodness, that there is no *useless* evil; so must we say of moral evil, sin, and wickedness; that, in the hands of God, every evil of every kind is made an instrument of greater good, and higher felicity, than would otherwise have been enjoyed.

Photinus was going on, as if he had something further to produce, when Volusian starting up in a kind of ecstasy, uttering the words of our great poet,

Just are the ways of God,  
And justifiable to men;  
Unless there be who think not God at all:  
If any be, they walk obscure\*:

You will pardon me, my friends, said he, this abrupt interference, and I hope Photinus will excuse me thus rudely breaking in upon him, to give vent to the happiness I feel this day in hearing from him so desirable a vindication of Providence, in respect of the calamities and painful sufferings, the abounding vice and misery of this lower world; that the whole has its origin in, and will in the end be found to be a part of, the divine goodness.

This is the clue so earnestly wished and sought for

\* Sampson Agonistes.

by us in the course of our argument and inquiry, to guide us through *the mighty maze*, and quiet the mind under the serious perplexities that arise from the view of these sad appendages of human life. In all ages, in seeking to account for such a state of things, consistently with the divine attributes, learned and thoughtful men, among other devices, have most commonly had recourse to the supposition, that it was in consequence of crimes committed in a former period of existence, that mankind were thrust into these dreary abodes of pain and misery, to expiate their previous guilt, and that this amply justified the divine Being in bringing us into such a world. But this was always found to be a fairy-land of imagination merely, without any facts or reality to support it; no passenger of all the sons or daughters of men ever having retained in memory the faintest trace of such a state; and the fond supposition served only to amuse and soothe the inventors and their followers.

In deed and truth, this, with which Photinus hath furnished us, is the only key that effectually unlocks the intricate wards of the divine government, and solves the difficulties of man's lot and destiny in this first stage of his existence.

I hope he will excuse my repeating his argument in a few words, that he may see I have not mistaken him.

“ That a Being of infinite wisdom and power, and the most perfect goodness, desirous of the happiness  
of

of his creatures, has made, appoints and regulates all things :”

“ That according to certain laws, perceived and acknowledged by all who will be at the pains to consider his works, he governs the world of nature ; feeds and preserves in life and happiness the whole sensitive inferior creation of birds and beasts, insects and fishes, &c. for their destined term of existence, longer or shorter ; and renews and continues the species of each from age to age :”

“ That he also takes care of and governs his rational creation, according to their different natures, leading them to their chief good, to piety and virtue ; all their powers and all their good actions proceeding from him ; and all that is bad and evil and irregular in them alike being from him, and under his controul, and permitted only to a certain degree and limit, so as to promote his designs of universal virtue and happiness.”

For want of seeing the perfect benevolence of the Deity in the light in which this just representation places him, as connected with a righteous moral government, begun here, and going on to its completion in another state, some great characters have sunk into most unhappy and baneful errors. The late king of Prussia, Frederick, the great, as he is called, here stumbled and fell, so as never to recover : and as I persuade myself it will not lead us out of the way of our present inquiries, I would crave your permission



sion to dwell a little on his story, from the materials with which he himself has furnished us.

From the writings probably of Leibnitz, and others, and the penetrating researches of an ardent mind, this prince was led very early to embrace sentiments concerning the necessity of human actions, which in the end he appears to have carried much farther than his teachers would have approved. On his first acquaintance and correspondence with M. de Voltaire, begun in 1737, when only prince royal, we find him thus expressing himself at the close of his defence of these sentiments, in reply to the objections of that celebrated writer :

“ I will add one remark \*,” says he, “ to what has gone before ; which is, that neither free-will nor necessity exculpates the Deity from being a party to the crimes of his creatures. For, whether he gives us a liberty to do evil, or directly prompts us to it, it is all the same ; it is still his doing. In going back to the origin of evil, you must ascribe it to God, unless you espouse the sentiment of the Manicheans concern-

\* Je n'ajouterai qu'une reflexion à celles que je viens de faire, c'est que ni le franc arbitre, ni la fatalité absolue, ne disculpent pas la Divinité de sa participation au crime : car que Dieu nous donne la liberté de mal faire, ou qu'il nous pousse immédiatement au crime, cela revient à peu près au même ; il n'y a que du plus ou du moins. Remontez à l'origine du mal, vous ne pouvez que l'attribuer à Dieu, à moins que vous ne voulez embrasser l'opinion des Manichéens touchant les deux principes ; ce qui ne laisse pas d'être hérissé de difficultés. Le 17 Fevrier, 1738.

Correspondance de Frederic II. Roy de Prusse,  
tome premier, 1789, p. 225.

ing two principles, one of them the author of evil ; which however is loaded with the greatest difficulties."

He could, however, never bring himself to a lasting satisfactory persuasion, that the present constitution of things was for good ; though he sometimes speaks most feelingly of it, and of its benevolent author. Nor could he relieve or remove the anxious thoughts on the subject, which at times would unavoidably obtrude themselves, by looking forward to a future state of being, where all evils and irregularities would be healed and corrected. For he appears to have been alienated in very early youth, to a most unreasonable degree, against the Jewish and Christian revelations, which might have given him light here, and been some ballast to his wavering mind. In consequence of these most unfortunate prejudices, he seems to have been without any, or at least to have got rid of all sentiments of the moral government of God, which may have contributed to make him more easy in the thought, with which at last he became unalterably impressed, that all was over with man, when he closed his eyes upon these present scenes ; concerning which he\* and his friend D'Alembert speak at times with-

• Du Roy, 9 Sept 1775. •

Savez-vous bien que je suis vieux, (63) et que si je ne vous revois dans ce monde-ci, je vous donnerai rendez-vous à pure perte dans la vallée de Josaphat.

- De M. D'Alembert, 15 Sept. 1775.

Je lui envie bien sincèrement le bonheur qu'il a eu d'approcher de V.M., et je désirerai de jouir de ce bonheur au moins encore une fois, avant de rendre mon corps aux élémens qui ne tarderont pas à le redemander.

Ditto, tome cinquième.

a gaiety

a gaiety and unconcern which is not natural, and indeed seems affected.

The same early prejudices hindered him from profiting by the wise lessons, and from all beneficial intercourse with the most liberal and eminently learned M. de Beausobre, whom nevertheless he most highly esteemed to the last; whence it happened, that his conversation chiefly lay with M. de Voltaire and the French philosophers, who were darker, and if possible more steeled and set against all just and proper inquiry into the subject of religion than himself. So that this eminent person of course plunged deeper and deeper in scepticism and uncertainty, and was driven at length to take refuge in the forlorn system of the world being eternal; and that therefore, as there was no creation, it was in vain to seek to account for any thing: grounding and reposing himself on that aphorism of several of the antient philosophers, *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, Nothing can come from nothing: which must be acknowledged to be true, when spoken of beings of limited powers, but is not applicable to God, whose power is infinite. For although to produce things out of nothing argues a power wholly inconceivable by us, there is no contradiction in it.

D'Alembert's \* letter to the king from Paris, Nov,  
30, 1770,

\* Enfin, en admettant cette Intelligence, qui a présidé à la formation de l'univers, et qui préside à son entretien, on sera obligé de convenir au moins qu'elle n'est ni infiniment sage, ni infini-

30, 1770, on this very subject, is full of much ill-placed wit and indecent raillery, to speak in the softest terms, against those who believed in the existence of a Creator and moral governor of the world, and shews how miserable he and his royal friend and patron were made by the principles they had embraced; and likewise what wretched reasoners and pitiable beings men of the brightest and most cultivated talents and abilities degenerate into, when they seek to extinguish the light that is in them, and turn away from God.

It would have been most happy for them both, if they had been possessed of and influenced by the like amiable views of the constitution of nature, and of its divine almighty Author, with Mons. Turgot, minister of state for some time to the unfortunate Louis XVI, their contemporary, and not unknown to them; in learning and abilities not inferior to either, in moral qualities far above them; which led him (though with prejudices against revelation, in France,

ment puissante, puisqu'il s'en faut bien, pour le malheur de la pauvre humanité, que ce triste monde soit le meilleur de mondes possibles. Nous sommes donc réduits, avec la meilleure volonté du monde, à ne reconnaître et à n'admettre tout au plus dans l'univers qu'un Dieu matériel, borné, et dépendant; je ne sais pas si c'est là son compte, mais ce n'est sûrement pas celui de partisans zélés de l'existence de Dieu; ils nous aimeraient autant Athées que Spinozistes, comme nous le sommes. Pour les adoucir, fesons-nous Sceptiques, et répétons avec Montagne, *Que sais-je?*—A Paris, ce 26 Novembre 1770.

Ditto, tome quatrième, p. 176.

at

at that period scarce avoidable by a rational mind) to look forward to a future state of existence, in which all present evils, and disorders and obliquities would be remedied and rectified\*.

But I have done, says Volusian, and have now to hope Photinus will excuse my rudeness and impetuosity ——— Not merely excuse, replies Photinus, but thank you most heartily for it, and for the good fruits it has produced. Take care, however, you do not bring yourself into a dilemma you cannot

\* For the high character of this virtuous minister of the unfortunate Louis XVI, Mons. Turgot, see Mons. Senac de Meilham (a): for which I am indebted, among many other favours for near thirty years, to one whose liberal, benevolent, and generous labours are constantly exerted in various ways to benefit mankind, and promote the cause of true religion and virtue (b).

To his suggestions jointly with those of another very able and most valuable Christian character (c), (to whose friendship, virtues, and memory, my heart pays the most affectionate and grateful tribute) was owing the variation made in the last edition of the Reformed Liturgy in 1793 after the model of the excellent Dr. Samuel Clarke, by changing the threefold address retained in the Litany, into one solemn and appropriate one: they justly observing, that a threefold address would keep up the old impression of a threefold nature in the Deity, so contrary to the Scriptures.

(a) *Du Gouvernement, des Mœurs, et des Conditions en France, avant la Révolution.*

(b) Francis Maseres, Esq. *Cursitor Baron of His Majesty's Court of Exchequer, and author of The Moderate Reformer.*

(c) John Lee, Esq. *Solicitor General under Lord Rockingham's administration.*

easily

easily get out of, by your too lavish commendations of us, and citation from our great poet in our favour; when others may retort upon you, that he most assuredly must have had us in his eye, as a set of well meaning, melancholy mortals attempting to account for what is beyond their reach, where he describes some of his inhabitants of Pandæmonium, who

reason'd high

Of Providence, foreknowledge, will, and fatè,

Fixt fate, freewill, foreknowledge absolute,

*And found no end, in wandering mazes lost.*

But the instances of the two memorable characters you have produced are much to our purpose, in so directly pointing out the fatal darkness and wretchedness that must ever ensue, when in an age so enlightened as that we live in, any can be so blinded as not to see a God, and a wise providential care exercised over all creatures for their good, especially all the rational part of them. You have fully shown, however, that it was by their acquired moral ignorance that they were so fatally misled, and not by their opinion of the necessity of human actions, on which some would lay blame.

It is, however, matter of the highest exultation and joy, in which we may justly triumph, to be fully assured, that mere arbitrary will and sovereignty, from which we could never know what we were to expect, hath no sway in the divine government under which we are placed; and that original love and goodness

are

are the beginning and end, the spring and measure of all the actions of the Deity, and of all his dealings with us. Hence, with the most perfect confidence, we conclude, that every evil of every kind is ordained for present or ultimate good: not only sickness, and pain, and disease in all its shapes, desolating storms, earthquakes, famine, pestilence, wars, and the ordinary and the less common calamities of life; but the horrid cruelties, injustice, oppression, &c. with which individuals and sometimes whole countries have had to struggle for a longer or shorter space: all these natural and moral evils are from God and under his sovereign control, so as to be permitted to spread no farther, and continue no longer than his purposes of good are served by them; dictating, in his supreme all-ruling providence, to wicked tyrants and oppressors of mankind, and to every instrument of evil, *Hitherto shalt thou go, and no further; here shall thy proud waves be stayed.* Job xxxviii.

In the solution we have offered, of the origin of the evil that there is in the world, it is conceded, that the Almighty knowingly and designedly appointed it, for the superior good that he saw would be derived from it. We, his frail and ignorant creatures, however, are on no account to transgress the plain rule of moral duty, to do evil that good may come: because our understandings are weak and limited; and we cannot be sure that the good we intend will happen. But our Maker, as we have seen at large, out of that li-  
mited

mitted quantity of evil which he judges fitting to appoint and permit, continually produces virtue and every good.

This is pleasingly exhibited to us in the well-known beautiful story of the Hermit, who, being perplexed to account for the ways of Providence, quitted his cell for a time, in quest of satisfaction to his anxious mind. The narrative is given us in "Divine Dialogues concerning the Attributes and Providence of God. London, printed 1668;" a work of the pious Dr. Henry More of Cambridge: but is better known in the poetical dress of Dr. Parnell.

We shall avoid some of the perplexity and difficulties in which good minds are wont to be involved, from the idea of the evil actions of men being of divine appointment, as though God himself were the immediate author of sin and wickedness, if we consider, that the Almighty Being, if we may so speak, acteth not immediately himself in directing the actions of men, and influencing them to good or evil; but it is by the intervention of instruments employed by him, of second causes, as we term it, in the natural course of things, and according to laws established by himself, that He, the first great cause, influences and governs all things, and bringeth them to pass. In other words, it is by the different motives that arise in our minds, from our situation and circumstances, which are all of divine appointment, that we are led to evil and to good. Thus are we to understand what is said, Acts xvi. 14. *The Lord opened the*



*the heart of Lydia to attend to the things spoken of Paul*; i. e. Her pious and virtuous mind, those good dispositions which she had imbibed from her situation and circumstances, all of which came originally from God, inclined her to listen to Paul.

Thus also, *The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh*; Exod. xi. 10. i. e. Being a man void of all just sense and knowledge of God, and totally indisposed to him, he became only the more alienated from obeying his commands by those miracles which had a natural tendency, and were wrought to produce obedience.

It is matter of constant observation, and verified in the sacred and in all history, that Divine providence oftentimes makes use of the evil passions and wickedness of men, to promote its good designs. That most horrid act of destroying the life of the holy and innocent Jesus was brought about by the treachery of one of his own disciples, and the mean temporizing spirit and conduct of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Acts iv. 25—28.

And the book of Genesis furnishes a remarkable example of the Almighty turning the wickedness of men to serve his own benevolent purposes, in the pleasing narrative of Joseph and his brethren.

*It was not ye that sent me into Egypt: for God did send me before you to preserve life*, Gen. xlv. 5. said Joseph to his brethren, to soothe them under their fears of being made to suffer for their cruel and unnatural behaviour. God was concerned in this act of theirs, by having brought them into life in

such a situation, wherein he foresaw they would meanly give way to a vile envy against their younger brother on account of his being of a more sprightly and amiable disposition than themselves, and more beloved by their father ; which stirred up their bad passions to seek his destruction, and sell him into Egypt.

On this history, an old writer thus remarks :  
“ Such an ordering and over-ruling hand hath God in all the evil actions of men. When Joseph’s brethren sell him into Egypt, God is said to *send* him. Human malice and divine providence may be together in the same act. Wherein men have an evil hand, God hath a good one ; who brings light out of darkness, and turns evil in the end to good.” Burthogge on Divine Goodness, p. 44.

It is, however, to be remembered, that whatever we define concerning the divine agency and government over mankind and their affairs, and the manner of it, of which we must ever conceive and speak, like children, most imperfectly ; and although we cannot but be persuaded that all the actions of men are under the antecedent direction and appointment of God, for how could he otherwise govern the world ? yet mankind are not a mere piece of clock-work, a set of unconscious machines. They acquire voluntary powers, by which they do what they please ; choose for themselves and follow their choice ; take blame to and condemn themselves for whatever they do that is impious, or wicked, or hurtful to others. And further,  
they

they do not think themselves unrighteously or inequitably dealt with in being made to suffer for their evil dispositions and actions in order to correct and amend them, under the divine government in the present world; nor, if they continue unreformed and unchanged, do they expect to escape punishment in a future state. So that, if God be charged in any way with being the author of men's sins, it is not in any such sense as to acquit the perpetrators; or so as to excuse them even in their own estimate from being responsible at the tribunal of that Being, whose laws, calculated for their own and the general good, they have violated.

In a word: we are conscious that we are not mere puppets acted upon; but agents, responsible for what we do. We are also fully persuaded, that all we do is beforehand known to God, and appointed by him. How this divine foreknowledge and appointment are to be reconciled with the freedom and responsibility of our actions, is beyond our comprehension; nor need we to be at all concerned about it. And in this conclusion Mr. Locke may quiet our minds, and also read an useful lesson of modesty and candour to our judgments concerning the word and the works of God. He, in his second answer to the Bishop of Worcester, who had accused him of advancing something concerning the nature of the soul, which implied that men were not free agents, thus replies to the charge:

“ It is not for me to judge how far your lordship’s speculations reach ; but finding in myself nothing to be truer than what the wise Solomon tells me, Eccles. xi. 5. *As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child ; even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all things :* I gratefully receive and rejoice in the light of revelation, which sets me at rest in many things, the manner of which my poor reason can by no means make out to me : Omnipotence, I know, can do any thing that contains in it no contradiction ; so that I readily believe whatever God has declared, though my reason find difficulties in it which it cannot master. As in the present case, God having revealed that there shall be a day of judgment, I think that foundation enough to conclude men are free enough to be answerable for their actions, and to receive according to what they have done ; though how man is a free agent surpass my explication or comprehension.”

Synesius seemed now inclined to take part in the debate ; but the rest of the company proposing that the further discussion of the subject should be deferred to another opportunity, he acquiesced in their wishes.

## CONVERSATION V.

SYNESIUS \*, who was an old common friend, and of all their parties, though in many points he differed from them ; and formerly in their conversations on Christian idolatry had endeavoured, on that account, to divert Volusian from quitting the worship of the established church, put himself forward at the next meeting, and pleasantly cried out, that he was quite tired of being such a cypher among them, but thought it became him first to make his confession, that they might admit him as a true penitent.

I must plainly tell you then, says he, I have been much hurt at the freedoms you used in calling in question what was established by authority in the church of England, as I thought it was unsettling people, and taking away the little foundation they had for their demeanour as quiet and good subjects, setting them loose from all restraints, and leaving them in possession of nothing. For I had been wont to consider the Christian religion principally as it concerned the state, and was useful to keep the people in order and subjection ; and indeed, all the while I contended so earnestly for it, entertained not a few doubts about its doctrines, and even its foundations.

\* For a character of this person, see *Conversations on Christian Idolatry*, p. 64.

But

But I have been for some time convinced, that serious doubts and disputes about religion do by no means lead men away from moral practice, but the contrary; as they sober the mind, bring us acquainted with ourselves and our own characters, and the principles well founded or otherwise on which we act, and thereby tend to fix us in a course of right conduct. Nor can any damage or disturbance ever result to the state, from disputes or differences of opinion in religion, if the state will only do its duty, and act as becomes it, by holding an equal hand over all its subjects, and restrain them from injuring or hurting one another for their religious differences.

But that I have not been of late an indifferent hearer, though I have taken no part in your debates, you will believe, when I tell you, that I have found my mind as fully relieved by them from many doubts on important subjects with which I had been perplexed, as if I had laid them before you for the purpose.

1. I have been, at times, much disturbed, that we were creatures so framed, that there was little pure happiness to be found, and so much pain and misery of one kind or other mixed in our cup, as if we had been the work of some envious being, who had grudged us our enjoyments. But I am now persuaded, that it was the happiness of the unthinking brute animals that I coveted, and not of a rational being; which cannot be attained without labour and difficulty.

2. The first chapters of our sacred books seemed to be

be a most strange exhibition of the God and Creator of all things, and of the first origin of our species, so enveloped in figure and allegory, that with difficulty can any tolerable sense be made of it; for I expected, that the proofs of his existence, and of his love and regard for his creatures, if he had really been possessed of these qualities, would have been pointed out to us in a brief energetic manner.

But I am now persuaded, that Divine Wisdom hath judged better for us in the methods which Moses has been directed to pursue. For that there is one God, and that he is good, his works of nature teach; and have been so understood by all who have considered them, a very few persons excepted, of pitiable mental or bodily infirmities, or both. But such an authoritative historical account as is furnished us in the Bible, of a God, as I may say, really existing and acting as our creator and moral governor, makes stronger impressions, gives fuller conviction, and is better calculated to operate upon the minds of human creatures, and carry down to all ages the momentous truth, than speculative arguments, which would be liable to perpetual dispute and quibble; as we find to have been the fact in antient times, and in our own.

3. I had been much hurt in perusing, and strongly tempted to slight the whole account of the Deity given in the Bible, for his being represented from the first and throughout, not as a benevolent creator, and patron and encourager of virtue and goodness, but an arbitrary,

- arbitrary, capricious, malevolent being\* ; bringing into existence a race of creatures, and soon repenting of what he had done, and destroying them ; and, upon renewing their race afterwards, conducting himself towards them in the same unsteady partial manner, selecting as the objects of his special favour, characters by no means worthy of it.

But you have satisfied me, that I condemned what I did not understand : that it was not the plan and design of the Creator to bring creatures any how to happiness, but by degrees, and by suitable discipline to form them to piety and goodness, the true felicity of rational beings.. This is plainly indicated in the account of the first creation of our species, and is the key with which we may open and explain many things belonging to our present state.

4. I had stumbled, with many others, at the divine command to destroy the Canaanitish nations, being persuaded that it could not come from a benevolent Creator, and that it was all the work and contrivance of priests and politicians, who had taken possession of the minds of the multitude, and presumed to represent as God's commands what was the dictate of their own implacable temper and ambition. But you have contributed to put me on further inquiry, and to

\* Upon this subject I would beg leave to recommend a serious perusal of the admirable and eloquent discourses on the Providence and Government of God, by a late excellent man and highly esteemed friend, the Rev. N. Cappe, of York.

convince



convince me, that it was not unbefitting the moral governor and the lover of his creatures, to interpose in the way Moses has described, to prevent the horrid practices that prevailed throughout those nations, at least to give a check, if not entirely to eradicate them ; and also to make his favoured nation the instruments of his judgments ; favoured, not for their own sakes, for they, as he told them, were not better than others, but for the sake of their more deserving progenitors. And throughout the sacred history, from the beginning, I see no *omnipotent tyrant*, no *Moloch*, *furious king*, as he has been described, delighting himself with the miseries and destruction of his creatures ; but a kind Creator and moral Governor, concerned for their best interests, and to bring them to true happiness.

5. I have also peculiar pleasure in noting throughout the books of Moses and the other sacred writers of the Old Testament, their vast care and attention to teach and to hold forth at all times, that there is *one God only, and no other besides him* ; not a *God composed of many persons*, which is a *thing of anti-christian invention*, but a God in the single person of Jehovah, God of Israel, God of the universe.

I am the more induced to name this, not only because it is a truth that lies at the foundation, and is of the greatest concernment ; but also through a desire to mention to you a late publication that may not have fallen in your way, of a respectable Swiss gentleman among us, Mr. De Luc, who enjoys the office  
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of Reader to the Queen, and has been made by the King Professor of philosophy and geology in the university of Gottingen, and who dedicates his tract, which is in the French language, to the King of Prussia. As I had been led to esteem the author, I was concerned and much disappointed, that he should at this day, upon such slight and imaginary grounds, set himself to deprive us of the one true God and father of the universe, and introduce in lieu of him, *God* consisting of three persons, the *Father*, the *Word*, and the *Spirit*, in the unity of his essence; al- luding in support of this to the text in 1 John v. 7, of the three heavenly witnesses; a text now almost unanimously given up as spurious, and not written by the apostle. Of which sentiment, the present bishop of Lincoln, to the credit of his judgment and integrity, hath lately declared himself in expressive terms. "I purposely omit the contested passage in the first epistle of St. John: there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one. In any case it would be im- proper to produce a doubtful text in support of so important a doctrine as that of the Trinity; but I must own, that after an attentive consideration of the controversy relative to that passage, I am convinced that it is spurious\*."

Mr. De Luc further grounds this doctrine of his on the plural termination of one of the Hebrew names

\* Elements of Christian Theology, vol. ii, p. 90.

of God, where his words are, referring his reader to the language of Moses in the beginning of Genesis\*; “The denomination of the Divinity,” says he, “is *plural*; that is *Elohim*, the *Father*, the *Word* and the *Spirit in the unity of his essence*†.”

After this, Mr. De Luc proceeds to confirm these positions, by referring (I give his words) to Mr. Thomas Maurice, one of the keepers of the British Museum; who, in his *Indian Antiquities*, lately published, professes to find the doctrine of a *Trinity*, or *plurality in the unity of God*‡, among those nations of antiquity, who, he thinks, must have received it from ancestors that were in possession of it anterior to the time of Moses; and thus furnish a fresh authority, as is supposed, for the doctrine of a *Trinity in unity in God*, independent of the sacred writings.

\* “MOÏSE commence la GENÈSE par la fixation de ces idées, qui ————— sont la base du Christianisme. Dès ce début, dis-je, la dénomination de la Divinité est un *pluriel*; c'est ELOHIM; le Père, la Parole et l'Esprit dans l'unité de son ESSENCE.”

Lettres sur l'Education religieuse de l'Enfance, précédées et suivies de Détails historiques—dédiées au Roi, par J. A. De Luc, Lecteur de Sa Majesté la Reine de la Grande Bretagne, Professeur de Philosophie et Géologie à Göttingue. A Berlin. 1800. pag. 138.

† Sec, on this subject, Mr. Frend's excellent *Animadversions on the Elements of Christian Theology*, Letter XII. in which is a clear confutation of the vain supposition of a plurality of persons in God from the use of a plural termination in one of his names. Ridgway. 1800.

‡ Le même, p. 139.

But

But both these arguments of these two learned gentlemen; the one, from the plural termination of Elohim, one of the Hebrew names of God; the other from the high antiquity of the doctrine of a Trinity in Unity and Plurality in God, without going into any other confutation of them, are set aside by the simple and most obvious consideration furnished by Moses and the Prophets, and the whole Hebrew scriptures; namely, that *whenever God is introduced in the sacred writings, as speaking of himself, or spoken of by others, or is himself addressed, the personal pronouns, I, thou, he, are invariably used;* which demonstrates to every understanding, that it is one single person, and not more than one, who is the God of Moses and the prophets and of the people of Israel, and consequently the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of all mankind.

This plain argument, which has been a thousand times produced, it is to be hoped will at last have some little attention paid to it, being nothing less, to those who respect the Scriptures, than the authority of God himself deciding the matter. For my part, I see more reason every day of my life, to be thankful for those divine records which have been preserved to us by Moses and the people of the Jews; as I fear, without them, what with the refinements of philosophy on the one hand, and the idolatrous superstition of Christians on the other, the one true God would have been overlooked and unknown. For these reasons, honouring that most antient nation of  
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the Jews with that high honour which is due to it, and grieved when I see them undeservedly scouted and despised and ill treated by Christians, I am almost tempted, whenever I meet a Jew, to move my hat to him, as one to whom I am under infinite obligations, as a martyr and confessor to the one true God.

6. It had given me much disturbance, that Christianity, which was ushered into the world, as we read, with such a profusion and expense of miracles, and is most truly a scheme to conduct the creatures of God to virtue and true happiness, worthy of the benevolent parent of mankind, should not have better made its way, and should have done so little to reform the world as it has hitherto been found to have done : I have been formerly often ready to reject it on this account.

But you have helped much to quiet my mind, and have cured my scepticism in this respect, by pointing out in what manner these powerful means of true piety and virtue have been blunted and impeded, and the salutary effects of this excellent doctrine counteracted by the corruptions that have been grafted upon and blended with it; and chiefly by its being poisoned and perverted almost in its cradle, as soon as the powers of the world began to give it their countenance, as an instrument of ambition and worldly designs and aggrandisement ; a service which it disdains ; by which it is sure to be polluted, and to have its true end and design of making men of all ranks and degrees virtuous and good, defeated; but a service in which,

which, unfortunately, it is forced, more or less, to drudge to this very hour.

Your account and illustration of the history of mankind, as delivered by Moses, and of the divine government exercised over them from the beginning, and also of the useful moral purposes answered by the deluge, has at last removed all my difficulties. And I am now persuaded that for these events, which had appeared to me out of nature and all credibility, there was a just foundation in fact, and the concurring testimony of antiquity to their truth, to which no unprejudiced person could refuse assent : and for this let me say I was beholden to Mr. Hume himself, which shews how wise and prudent, as well as just and right in itself, it is to allow the utmost latitude of discussion, and liberty of publishing their sentiments to ingenious men on all subjects, especially those of religion, however contrary they may be to what is publicly received and believed.

For, in the reply of an excellent person to that gentleman's " Essay on Miracles," (which unquestionably is calculated and was intended to overthrow all belief of the divine revelation contained in the Bible, and of the Christian religion in particular, and has certainly influenced many unwary readers to turn away entirely from it) there are given, with much good temper and liberality, a solid confutation of his arguments against miracles, and a defence of the people of the Jews, and of their sacred history, in opposition to the subtle objections and attacks of this shrewd and  
bold

bold adversary, with much other important remark connected with it; all which the Christian world would have been deprived of, to their great loss, had not Mr. Hume drawn it forth and given occasion to this work.

I would here refer you to "An Essay in answer to Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles," by William Adams, M. A. Minister of St. Chad's, Salop. The second edition, with additions, 1749.

Towards the close of the work Mr. (since the very eminent Dr.) Adams remarks: "The remainder of this Essay is little more than a rude insult on the Scriptures and the Christian religion. For fear his (Mr. Hume's) readers should mistake his meaning, and not apply his argument where he intended, the author proceeds, with a smiling grimace, to tell us, *that our most holy religion is founded on faith, not on reason; and it is a sure method of exposing it, to put it to such a trial as it is by no means fitted to endure.*' This he pretends to make evident by examining the miracles related in the Pentateuch." 'Here,' says he, 'we are to consider a book presented to us by a barbarous and ignorant people, wrote in an age, when they were still more barbarous, and, in all probability, long after the facts it relates, corroborated by no concurring testimony, and resembling those fabulous accounts which every nation gives of its origin. Upon reading this book we find it full of prodigies and miracles: it gives an account of a state of the world and of human nature entirely different from the present ;

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of our fall from that state; of the age of man extended to near a thousand years; of the destruction of the world by a deluge; of the arbitrary choice of one people as the favourites of heaven, and that people the countrymen of the author; of their deliverance from bondage by prodigies the most astonishing imaginable: I desire any one to lay his hand upon his heart, and, after serious consideration, declare, whether he thinks that the falsehood of such a book, supported by such a testimony, would be more extraordinary and miraculous than all the miracles it relates; which is, however, necessary to make it be received, according to the measures of probability above established.'—*So far Mr. Hume's representation of the contents of the Bible.*

*Reply to the above by Dr. Adams.*

“ If the Jews were thus more than barbarous at the time when these books were written, whence, without a miracle, could they learn all the great truths relating to the being and attributes of God, which the most learned part of the world were for many ages after in total ignorance about? Whence could the religion and laws of this people so far exceed those of the wisest heathen, and come out at once, in their first infancy, thus perfect and entire, when all human systems are found to grow up by degrees, and to ripen after many improvements into perfect-



perfection? The Jews had but little commerce with other nations, and therefore did not excel in literature and the arts of Greece: but the same scriptures, which prove that they were earlier in possession of the most useful and sublime parts of knowledge, secured them likewise from ever sinking into that barbarity which the author charges upon them. Let any one compare the book of Genesis, which he treats with so much freedom, and which is, by many centuries, the *oldest* book in the world, with any of the earliest heathen historians; let him compare the Psalms of David with the Hymns of Callimachus or Orpheus; let him read the History of Josephus, who was just contemporary with Christ and his apostles; and he will incline to judge more favourably of this people.

“The great events recorded in this history have no connection with the argument of miracles, and therefore do not belong to this place. But these are corroborated by the strongest concurring testimony that can be desired to facts that are, most of them, older than the use of letters itself. The traditions of every country seem all to point to one and the same original. The late invention of arts and sciences, the foundation of cities and empires, the manner of peopling the world, and the number of its present inhabitants, seem all to prove that the world had its beginning no earlier than the period assigned by Moses, and agree perfectly with the account of the deluge. There are no monuments of antiquity which give

room to suspect the world of earlier original. The first authors of Greece and Egypt speak of the chaos, of the abyss of waters that covered the earth, of man's being formed out of the ground, and of his first innocence. From these, one of the Latin poets has described the creation, the state of innocence, the gradual corruption of mankind, and the deluge, in a manner very nearly resembling that of Moses. The memory of a general flood, which destroyed the whole race of men and animals, except one family, seems to have been preserved for some ages among almost all nations. Lucian tells us, the tradition among both the Greeks and Syrians was, that this was a judgment from Heaven on the wickedness of mankind: he describes the manner of the flood, the ark in which some of every kind were preserved, and many other particulars, just as we have them in the book of Genesis. Plutarch, alluding to the same tradition, mentions the ark, and even the dove that was sent forth to see if the waters were abated. A great number of antient authors, who mention the deluge, and gave witness to the building of Babel, the burning of Sodom, and many other great events in the Mosaic history, are reckoned up by Josephus, Grotius, and others. The present surface of the earth, the shells of fish that are found in midland countries, and even on the tops of mountains, and the remains of land-animals at very great depths in the earth, are still surviving monuments of the deluge. It is almost certain that the world began to be peopled about the plains

plains of Babylon, and near where the ark is said to have rested. From the East, colonies of men were sent westward : and from thence we can trace pretty distinctly the progress of arts and sciences. The long lives of the first men are spoken of by all the heathens. This fact is so far from discrediting the Mosaic history, that Monsieur Pascal reckons it a full proof of the fidelity of the author: ‘ This historian,’ says he, ‘ has brought the deluge, and even the creation, so near his own time, by means of the few generations which he counts between them, that the memory of them could not but be still fresh and lively in the minds of all the Jewish nation.’ In the line of tradition there are but five steps betwixt Moses and the first man. ‘ Therefore, the creation and the deluge are indubitably true. This argument,’ says he, ‘ must be acknowledged for conclusive by those who apprehend its process.’ “ The longevity of men in the first ages seems necessary for the better peopling the world, the invention and improvement of arts, and for propagating religious, and all useful knowledge, when they depended wholly on tradition. And I am persuaded that this author cannot even invent a more probable or rational account of peopling the world than this which he affects to deride.”

You have not been deficient in bearing testimony to the character of *Abraham, the friend of God*, as he is termed by high authority ; though without ascribing to him that perfection which belongs not to him. In taking a concubine, he did no more than conform to

a custom which was very general in those early times, and not disreputable. Nor was there any thing wrong or unkind in his dismissal of Hagar, on the complaint of her mistress and for peace' sake ; since there is every reason to believe, from the subsequent history of Ishmael, and particularly as we find him afterwards joined with Isaac in paying the last tribute of affection and duty to the remains of his father, that neither Hagar nor her son were thrown upon the world neglected and forlorn.

But you have not touched upon his obedience to the Divine command to slay his only son ; which may give us pause, and is by some much condemned ; and yet when duly examined and understood, we shall find that Abraham therein manifested the noblest principles of piety and virtue, worthy of the high commendations and reward with which he was honoured by the Almighty.

These principles were a trust in the power and goodness of God, in preference to every tender feeling of nature, and every worldly consideration that might shake his resolution of complying with what he was persuaded to be the Divine command : although it was not a blind obedience that he paid ; but grounded on the highest reason. This the Apostle tells us, Heb. xi. 17, 18, 19. *By faith Abraham when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he that had received the promises, offered up his only son of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called ; i. e. though he had a promise from God, that his posterity was to be*  

derived

derived from Isaac, on receiving this Divine command he hesitated not to make a sacrifice of him ; *accounting that God was able to raise him up from the dead ; from whence also he received him in a figure, or rather, as from a like condition he had received him, as it is better rendered by Mr. Wakefield, referring, in these last words, to the miraculous birth of Isaac, when his parents were past child-bearing, as good as dead, as the Apostle, Heb. xi. 12. expresses himself, in another place.*

There is a sermon from these words by Archbishop Tillotson, preached at Whitehall, in 1686, before the Princess Anne; entitled “ On the Excellency of Abraham’s Faith and Obedience,” highly worthy of perusal ; in which after shewing on what solid and good grounds Abraham acted, and conducted himself, in obeying the Divine command, and what a pattern of piety and virtue he therein was ; that great and good man, and eminent preacher and teacher, makes the following inferences from the whole : with which I promise myself you will be pleased as I have been, as they shew this excellent person’s method of reasoning, and the sound and liberal principles he goes upon. And as they are of importance in weighing and examining this much controverted action of Abraham, and in vindicating the character of the father of the Hebrew nation, I hope you will not be offended with their prolixity ; he infers then,

“ First, Human nature is capable of full and clear satisfaction concerning a Divine revelation. For,  
if

if Abraham had not been fully and past all doubt assured that this was a command from God, he would certainly have spared his son. And nothing is more reasonable than to believe, that those, to whom God is pleased to make immediate revelations of his will, are some way or other assured that they are divine; otherwise they would be in vain, and to no purpose.

“ But how men are assured concerning Divine revelations made to them, is not so easy to make out to others; only these two things we are sure of :

1. “ That God can work in the mind of man, a firm persuasion of the truth of what he reveals, and that such a revelation is from him. This no man can doubt of, that considers the great power and influence which God who made us, and perfectly knows our frame, must needs have upon our minds and understandings.

2. “ That God never offers any thing to any man’s belief, that plainly contradicts the natural essential notions of his mind; because this would be for God to destroy his own workmanship, and to impose that upon the understanding of man, which, whilst it remains what it is, it cannot possibly admit.

“ For instance, we cannot imagine, that God should reveal to any man any thing that plainly contradicts the essential perfections of the divine nature; for such a revelation can no more be supposed to be from God, than a revelation from God that there is no God; which is a downright contradiction.

“ Now, to apply this to the revelation which God  
made

made to Abraham concerning the sacrificing of his son : This was made to him by an audible voice, and he was fully satisfied by the evidence which it carried along with it, that it was from God.

“ For this was not the first of many revelations that had been made to him, so that he knew the manner of them, and had found by manifold experience that he was not deceived, and by this experience was grown to a great confidence in the truth and goodness of God. And it is very probable the first time that God appeared to Abraham, because it was a new thing, that to make way for the credit of future revelations, God did shew himself to him in so glorious a manner, as was abundantly to his conviction.

“ And this St. Stephen does seem to insinuate, Acts vii. 2. *The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia.* Now by this glorious appearance to him at first, he was so prepared for the entertainment of after-revelations, that he was not staggered even at this, concerning the sacrificing of his own son, being both by the manner of it, and the assurance that accompanied it, fully satisfied that it was from God.

“ Secondly. I observe from hence the great and necessary use of reason in matters of faith. For we see here that Abraham's reason was a mighty strengthening and help to his faith. Here were two revelations made to Abraham, which seemed to clash with one another; and if Abraham's reason could not  
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have reconciled the repugnancy of them, he could not possibly have believed them both to be from God ; because this natural notion or principle, that *God cannot contradict himself*, every man does first, and more firmly believe, than any revelation whatsoever.

“ Now Abraham’s reason relieved him in this strait. So the text expressly tells us, *he reasoned with himself*, that God was able to raise his son from the dead.

“ And this being admitted, the command of God, concerning the slaying of Isaac, was very well consistent with his former promise to Abraham, that *in Isaac his seed should be called*.”

*So far the good archbishop.*

I shall be indulged, I know, in adding one or two things.

1. From the account of the divine command to Abraham to slay his son, of the design of it, and of the execution of it being prevented, as the whole of it lies in the sacred history, an unbiassed well disposed mind would conclude that the Deity thereby intended to promote and encourage piety and virtue ; nor could it naturally have any other tendency, or bear any other construction.

2. Distressed as Abraham must have been on receiving such a command, he had no doubts whatsoever of it being his duty to obey it ; as he was persuaded, and rightly persuaded, that God could command nothing but what was right and good.

All that could be necessary to satisfy his mind, was  
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to be perfectly assured that the command came from God; and of this he had the fullest conviction, as we have just now seen.

3. It is not for his own information that God, who knows before-hand what each person will do, makes trial of his creatures, or puts difficulties and embarrassments before them in the way of their duty; but to strengthen and confirm their virtuous principles, and make them examples, and an encouragement to each other.

4. No one can take upon him to deny that God might thus make trial of the piety and virtuous principles of Abraham, without denying at the same time his power and right to govern the world as seems good to him, and to fit its rational inhabitants by moral discipline for the several parts he destines them to act and fill in it; in short, without denying all miraculous interpositions whatsoever, all interference of the Deity in teaching and directing his creatures beyond what they can learn from observations on the present established course of things, and the laws by which the natural system is governed and preserved: A most vain assumption, assuredly, this, in mortal man, whose ignorance is so great, and judgment so weak and incompetent! which implies on the face of it, that he is wiser than God; which is the next step to denying that there is any God at all, and which has led not a few into that bewildered and desolate state of mind, of which, and I thank you for it, at our last

meeting, you gave us some wretched and melancholy examples.

You will bear with me going on, my friends, now I have begun, in suggesting to you, that you have left untouched a main difficulty, which Christianity puts in the way of your attempt to vindicate the divine goodness, by its teaching the doctrine of endless punishments to the wicked, although you have prepared the way for removing the difficulty, by your manner of explaining the divine moral government under which we are. For you have well shewn that under this, all events, respecting all of us, are so directed and overruled, that piety and virtue, or obedience to the divine laws, is its own reward, and promotes our happiness, and vice or disobedience is its own punishment, and produces misery. And in agreement with this our moral constitution, we find, that grievous and exquisitely painful as are at times the sufferings both of mind and body to which we are made liable by our violation of the divine commands, these sufferings are nevertheless beneficial to us ; we should have been worse characters, and less happy upon the whole, without such checks and reproofs. They tend to soften and subdue our pride and selfishness, which are the source of well nigh all our misery and wickedness, and force us to sober reflection, to see and correct our evil tempers and practices.

And as in our next state after death we continue under the same laws and divine moral government, we  
cannot

cannot but conclude that those most lasting punishments, which both reason and revelation conspire to teach us will in that future state await all evil doers, enemies of God and goodness, must in the progress of infinite ages produce a change and amendment in their dispositions and a return to virtue and goodness; unless their Maker, by a sovereign act of power, hardens their hearts and prevents the natural effect of their sufferings.

But this is such an idea of God, that one would much sooner believe there was no such Being than suppose he could be capable of any thing of the kind, and therefore we may conclude without hesitation, that the sufferings of the future state must have a beneficial effect on the sufferers.

I would also further submit to your consideration, that as the Christian Scriptures assure us that all the dead shall be raised to life to be judged according to their works, as they have done good or evil in the present life; and do thereby implicitly give us hope, may we not rather say, give us humble assurance, that the gloomy sentence of annihilation will not pass on any of our species, for we cannot entertain the thought that our benevolent Creator would bring back his creatures to life to put them on the rack as it were, and make them suffer for a time, and then consign them to their primitive nothing: we may therefore make this inference, that none of the human race, however multiplied and aggravated their crimes may have been, will be consigned to fruitless unavailing suffering

suffering and misery for ever, but in the long course of ages, and by the discipline to which they will be doomed, all will be brought to repentance, and be saved. I must however profess that those severe threatenings of the Gospel of eternal punishments, have long since ceased to make any impression on my mind, being counterbalanced by the contrary declarations so frequently occurring concerning the Almighty ; that he loveth all his creatures, and is desirous that they should not perish (John iii. 16.), but have everlasting life ; that he would (1 Tim. ii. 4.) have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth ; to be saved, i. e. made happy, which must imply they will be so in the end : as it would otherwise argue that he has not the power to effect the good he desires, and so must be disappointed ; which is not to be supposed of him, who is supremely perfect both in power and goodness.

I shall have reason to think myself happy, adds Synesius, here rising up, if I have not tired you all by taking up so much of your time, and if my remarks, all of them in some measure of your own growth, may not be judged foreign to your noble design of vindicating the ways of God to man.

Very far from it, declared Photinus with a countenance full of pleasure, in finding their old associate come forward to take such an important share in their present debates ; you have done us honour, and, I will venture to say, have given great satisfaction to all of us, not merely in approving the progress we have  
made

made in our inquiry, but in corroborating and illustrating it with many new observations of great moment ; especially in what you have done towards relieving the Gospel from the imputation of holding forth the doctrine of everlasting torments of the wicked, a millstone which some mistaken Christians had hung about it, and thereby alienated the minds of many.

I persuade myself, continued Photinus, that it would have been impossible for Christians to put such a construction upon the words of their great Master, so repugnant to every idea we can form of the divine Being, that men would be condemned to endless sufferings for the crimes of this brief passing state, if their understandings had not been quite overawed and overpowered by taking for granted that the language and words used by Christ on the subject, *eternal*, *everlasting*, *for ever*, and the like, implied an endless duration so directly and absolutely, as to forbid all further inquiry or doubt about their meaning. Whereas, in fact, the terms generally signify periods of duration, more or less extended, and have at no time this signification, unless when determined to it by the subject to which they are applied ; viz. God, his mercy or goodness, and the like.

So that our Saviour, in using this language, intended only to express, that the sufferings of the future state would be of an exceeding long duration ; thereby to inculcate and enforce the necessity and vast importance

portance of the attention of mankind to the divine laws, and the most dreadful danger of violating them; of going out of the world under the power of evil, malignant, ungodly dispositions and habits; and this from the most benevolent motive, that they might be powerfully excited to avoid those exquisite sufferings and miseries of the next state, which although they will have an end, as we have been shewing, yet it will be then only, when their evil dispositions shall be changed and amended.

It is of importance here to be noted, that in that fine affecting description of the day of judgment, at the conclusion of Matt. xxv. the *everlasting punishment* expressly denounced against those who opposed the spread of the Gospel, was necessary for their own good and that of all the world, this being the means appointed by the divine Being for the reformation, virtue, and final happiness of the human race for ever. Wherefore an opposition to it was of so heinous a nature, that no threatening could be too strong to deter men from it.

But we are not to conclude that *everlasting punishment* means punishment without end, but only such as was to remain till the evil was done away by repentance: for neither the language used, nor the reason of the thing, admits of any other sense. The phrase, everlasting fire, not literally such, but a form of expression adopted to keep men from that hardness of heart, and insensibility to the temporal  
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and eternal good of others, which, while it lasts, incapacitates for pure happiness both in this world and in the next.

And now in conclusion, what has frequently satisfied my own mind on this momentous concluding point, the final happiness of all mankind, I cannot help proposing to your consideration, from the second volume of Dr. Hartley's works; a writer of such compass of mental discernment, and true christian philosophy, as has no competitor. And I shall in his words close our conversation.

“ Can it be supposed that an infinitely merciful Father will cast off his son entirely, and doom him to eternal misery, without farther trials than what this life affords? We see numberless instances of persons at present abandoned to vice, who yet, according to all probable appearances, might be reformed by a proper mixture of correction, instruction, hope, and fear. And what man is neither able nor willing to do, may and must, as should seem, be both possible to God, and actually effected by him. He must have future discipline of a severe kind for those whom the chastisements of this life did not bring to themselves. Yet still they will all be fatherly chastisements, intended to amend and perfect, not to be final and vindictive. That the bulk of sinners are not utterly incorrigible, even common observation shews, but the History of Association makes it still more evident; and it seems very repugnant to analogy to suppose that any sinners, even the very worst that ever lived,

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should

should be hardened beyond the reach of all suffering, of all selfishness, hope, fear, good-will, gratitude, &c. For we are all alike in kind, and do not differ greatly in degree here. We have each of us passions of all sorts, and lie open to influences of all sorts; so as that the persons A. and B. in whatever different proportions their intellectual affections now exist, may, by a suitable set of impressions, become hereafter alike.

“ These, and many such like reasonings, must occur to attentive persons upon this subject, so as to make it highly unsuitable to the benevolence of the Deity, or to the relation which he bears to us, according to the mere light of nature, that infinite irreversible misery, to commence at death, should be the punishment of the sins of this life. And by pursuing this method of reasoning, we shall be led first to exclude misery upon the balance, and then to hope for the ultimate unlimited happiness of all mankind.”

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### CONVERSATION THE LAST.

THE subjects of the former conversations occupied the attention of the company for some time at the next meeting, when it was observed to Marcellinus, that in a former conversation\*, when he was point-

\* Page 38.



ing to the causes of the great misery and wickedness which are complained of in the world, he had named one with which Revelation alone acquaints us, viz. the baneful influence and interference of an Evil Being, called the Devil or Satan, in the affairs of men ; but had since been wholly silent about it, as if it were a thing deserving no consideration.

It seems to me, observed here Synesius, that it is not to be thus slightly passed over. For although you, Marcellinus, have satisfactorily proved, that nature rightly understood holds forth only good ; that the pains and sufferings, at which we murmur so loudly, are kindly intended, and in general beneficial to us, and we should not be so happy as we are at present without them ; and even sin and wickedness are by the divine wisdom and mercy converted to good : nevertheless, as revelation is generally understood to teach, and the gospel in particular by many asserted to be founded upon the reality of such an Evil Being, and such unquestionably has the appearance of being a principal agent throughout the New Testament ; how much soever the thing may be made light of by some as utterly improbable and inconsistent with every idea we can form of the divine goodness, your vindication of that goodness will be lame and defective, unless you can shew the insufficiency of these presumed divine authorities to prove the existence of such a foul malignant fiend, which not a few Christians with great earnestness maintain.

As therefore you have done me the favour to take  
in

in good part the remarks I presumed to offer in the discussion in which you are engaged, I shall be happy if the thoughts which I have with some diligence put together on the present subject, meet with your approbation.

The company expressed high satisfaction, and Synesius continued his address.

It is somewhat extraordinary that in the history of the transgression of the first parents of mankind, at the beginning of our sacred books, it should be so very generally current with the learned as well as the unlearned, that by the serpent, who is represented as misleading them to violate the command of their maker, we are to understand, a wicked spirit, the supposed enemy and opposer of God, and author of all evil; when at the same time Moses, who gives us the account of the transaction, never intimates that it is so to be understood, in this, or in any other part of his writings.

Neither, it is observable, do the learned Jewish writers, who were contemporary with the apostles of Christ, and whose writings happily remain, give into this interpretation, but generally supposed the serpent to signify men's depraved appetites and passions, or whatever, in their situations, could excite and entice our first parents to do evil and sin against God.

That Moses himself did not intend to describe the evil being called the Devil, to have deceived Eve under the shape of a serpent, appears farther from his  
never

never making mention of such an evil being as having any existence at all then, or alluding to it afterwards in the five books ascribed to him. Whence we may reasonably conclude that he did not know or believe that there was any such powerful mischievous being, who had connexion with mankind; because, had he known it, he would not have failed to apprise his nation of it, and warn them of their danger from him.

We must own indeed, that there is mention made of *devils*, in Leviticus xvii. 7. where it is said, *They shall no more offer their sacrifices unto devils; after whom they have gone a-whoring*; and in Deuteronomy xxxii. 17. we read, *They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not*. This, however, is not the language of Moses, but of his translators, who knowing these to be the names of heathen gods, whom they took to be evil spirits, on that account gave them the name of *devils*, instead of preserving their true names, which they ought to have done.

The word used in the original, in the first instance, שְׂעִירִים, soirm, signifies goats, hairy beings, the sacred animals of Egypt, worshipped by them with the most obscene rites. The other name in Deuteronomy, שְׂדִים, sdim, is from a root that signifies to desolate, to lay waste, to destroy, a proper characteristic of the gods of Canaan, who were of later date,

date, supposed to be deceased kings and mighty warriors, were worshipped by human sacrifices, and with whom the Israelites had become more lately acquainted; and for their compliance in this horrid worship, they are here and elsewhere severely reprov'd. See particularly Psalm cvi. 37, 38. *Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils (דִּימוֹ, sdim, demons, dead men deified), and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan\*.*

It is not to be passed over here, that *familiar spirits* are spoken of in the books of Moses and other parts of the sacred history. And as this is presumed to have a reference to devils and witches, ignorant persons may thereby be imposed upon to think there is some reality in such things. But it should be told them, that the term *familiar spirit* has nothing to answer it in the original, but was put in of their own heads, by the learned men employed in the last translation of the Bible by authority, in the time of James I. soon after he came to the throne, to favour some notions of the king's about these matters; and in complaisance to him also in this respect, the laws of the country were made more severe against the super-

- \* Levit. xix. 31. xx. 6.
- Deut. xviii. 11. 1 Sam. xxviii. 3, 7, 8, 9.
- 2 Kings xxi. 6. xxiii. 24.
- 1 Chron. x. 13. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 6.
- Isaiah viii. 19. xxix. 4.

stitious

stitious practices of sorcery and witchcraft. We are told that king James himself came off very much from these notions in his elder years ; yet, as a wise and excellent person observes \*, from whom I have this account, “ when laws and translations are fixed, it is a difficult thing to change them.”

It may be necessary here to obviate a common prejudice, that the Hebrew word Satan, to which corresponds the Greek word *δαιμονας*, *diabolus*, by which it is generally rendered in the Greek version of the Old Testament, that these words stand for the supposed evil being, as his proper name, which is by no means the case. For in their first and proper sense, they signify an enemy, adversary, calumniator, or the like ; and to this sense we shall always do well to adhere, unless the circumstances of the passage demand the contrary.

Thus Numb. xxii. 22. we read, *And God's anger was kindled because he (Balaam) went ; and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary (Satan) against him.* 2 Sam. xix. 22. *And David said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries (Satan) unto me ?* In these and such like passages, every one will judge for himself, whether any thing more is to be understood than the plain construction of the words implies, without any farther reference.

\* See Dr. Hutchinson on Witchcraft, pages 178, 179, 180.

1 Chron. xxi. 1. *And*      2 Sam. xxiv. 1. *And*  
*an adversary (Satan) stood again the anger of the*  
*up against Israel, and LORD was kindled against*  
*provoked David to number Israel, and he moved Da-*  
*vid against them to say,*  
*Go, number Israel and*  
*Judah.*

The parallel passages explain each other.

Satan, provoking David to number Israel, was the advice of an enemy ; the suggestions of pride and vain confidence in the strength and power of his dominions, and of odious ingratitude to God in leaving him, to whom all was owing, out of his thoughts, and out of the account.

Zechariah iii. 1, 2. *And he shewed me Joshua the high priest, standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan, even the LORD that hath chosen Israel rebuke thee !*

Joshua the high priest is in this passage stirred up to set about the building of the temple under the promise of divine assistance. The Samaritans (Prideaux, vol. i.) who opposed the building, are styled Satan the adversary. Probably the prophet meant no more by the LORD, Jehovah, speaking to the adversary, than that Jehovah would rebuke and restrain him.

Archbishop Newcome, in his Translation of the Minor Prophets, shews, that in this passage the term  
Satan

Satan signifies only *adversary*, without any reference to an evil spirit.

And Satan in the book of Job, being mentioned only in the introduction to the poem, seems to be a fictitious personage, a kind of poetical embellishment of the piece. He is moreover not characterized as an evil being; not tempting or seducing to evil, only asking leave to inflict pain and misfortune, thereby to make trial of Job's piety and virtuous principle. And Job and his friends throughout ascribe his calamities to God immediately, and seem to have had no thought of an evil being, Satan, whom they never name, nor drop any hint of his agency in human affairs.

I have now considered all those passages that seem needful to be produced, and are supposed to exhibit and hold forth the existence and agency of an evil being in the Jewish scriptures, but have not found that they expressly teach, or that it is to be gathered from them, that there is any such being. And it is no small confirmation that these scriptures have been rightly interpreted by us, as we perceive not in them any religious exhortations or cautions to beware of the wiles and power of such an evil being, in their sacred history and prophetic writings, from first to last.

Now, as in the Christian scriptures, in which so much is spoken of the devil, of Satan, and the evil one, it is certain that we have no new revelation of the reality of the evil being who is supposed to be described

described under these different names ; and it has been shewn that the Jews could not take the opinion which they appear to hold of such a being in the time of Christ from their own sacred books ; it follows that it must have come among them, during their dispersion and captivity in Babylon : and most probably they learned it of the Chaldeans, among whom they dwelt ; whose early reception of this doctrine is testified by many antient authors.

And that this was an opinion of great antiquity in the East is confirmed by the prophet Isaiah xlv. xlv. where he speaks of Cyrus, king of Persia, many years before he was born, as the future restorer of the Jewish temple, in terms of allusion to their eastern doctrine of two principles of all things, a good and evil one ; but in such a way as effectually to set aside and confute their error, by asserting that evil as well as good came from God alone.

Isaiah xlv. ver. 8. *I form the light and create darkness : I make peace and create evil : I the Lord do all these things.*

The Israelites, ever prone to adopt the principles and practices of their heathen neighbours, sojourning among these Chaldeans, famous for science and natural knowledge, would most probably learn of them and adopt the notions of their conquerors ; who might point out to them, or they might themselves imagine, that the serpent who is represented as acting such a principal part in their own sacred history, was the evil principle of the Chaldeans, and thence they would



would proceed to ascribe to it all the sin and misery that was in the world.

It may be presumed also, that by their constant intercourse and communication with this learned people they imbibed their whole philosophy concerning demons, and good and evil spirits, as well as the existence of one chief evil spirit: so that at their return from their long captivity in Babylon, they had incorporated these doctrines into their theology, as being those of their own sacred writings, although these writings not only taught them nothing of the kind, but continually condemned them. And although by the time that Christ made his appearance they were much come off from such a Heathenish doctrine, yet their language, which had been framed and accommodated to it, would remain in common use, and to that our Saviour and his apostles would conform themselves, though there is no good reason to think that either the one or the other gave credit to the reality of this evil being.

It being however thus the popular belief that all sin and evil was from Satan, the devil, or the evil one, the apostles of Christ having to describe how and by what hard trials and temptations their great master's piety and virtue were exercised and strengthened, to fit him for his arduous and important office of Saviour and Reformer, endowed with extraordinary divine powers to qualify him for it: according to the accounts of Matthew and Luke, who alone mention this singular transaction, it is Satan, the devil, in conformity

to the general creed that all evil was from him, whom they describe as the agent in this trial or temptation of Christ; who is represented as employed in endeavouring to corrupt his virtue and integrity, by drawing him from his trust and dependence upon God alone, and prompting him to make use of his miraculous powers to gratify his own vanity and worldly views, although no evil being whatsoever were concerned in the matter, which we are compelled to conclude from the utter improbability of the literal account, but which may otherwise be satisfactorily accounted for.

Let us then take into consideration our Lord's sentiments concerning Satan.

1. We may observe that Christ very commonly uses the words Satan, devil, in their proper and primary sense, as signifying an enemy, adversary, traitor, or the like, and not an evil being.

*Matth. xvi. 23. But he turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan! thou adversary.*

Archbp. Newcome.

*Mark viii. 33. He rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan! thou adversary.* Archbp. Newcome.

*John vi. 70. Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? and yet one of you is a false accuser.*

2. There is no ground to conclude from Christ sometimes using the terms Satan, the devil, the evil one, as signifying the supposed evil being, that he would thereby imply, or have others understand

him to imply, that there was in reality such an evil being.

This we learn from himself in very many passages of the gospel history.

Among others I would mention his reply to his disciples on their return from a commission in which he had been employing them, to preach the gospel of repentance and remission of sins, in his lifetime. When, upon their telling him with exultation, that by the power they derived from him they had been enabled to heal diseases, which in those times were ascribed to demons, Luke x. 17, 19. And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject unto us through thy name ; He said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. In this answer he foretels, for their encouragement, the farther happy effects which would attend the preaching of his gospel.

To fall from heaven (see that fine description of the king of Babylon, to which there is allusion, Isaiah xiv. 12.) is to be deprived of power and authority. How was Satan to lose or be deprived of his power and authority by the preaching of the gospel, which is calculated to change and to cure men's wicked and evil dispositions, but cannot have any effect on Satan, an invisible, powerful, wicked being, supposing there were any such ? As this, then, is a thing impossible, we are unavoidably led to understand our Lord as expressing himself in the well known eastern style, to which his disciples and countrymen

were accustomed, and to speak of Satan as a person or living agent, when he thereby only meant those selfish worldly desires, that hatred of God and goodness, which are supposed to characterize such a being. There is then, by Christ's own interpretation, no such evil being as we call Satan or the devil. And Satan, or the devil, is not a powerful evil being without us, but impious, malignant, cruel tempers and dispositions within us, which lead us to sin against God, and to hurt and destroy the peace, virtue, and happiness of our fellow-creatures.

3. This, our Lord's sentiment of the nullity of Satan, or the devil, or the evil one, we find confirmed in other passages.

Luke viii. 12. *The devil cometh and taketh the word out of their hearts.*

Matth. xiii. 19. *The evil one cometh and snatcheth away that which was sown in their hearts.*

Matth. xiii. 39. *The enemy that soweth the tares is the devil.*

Mark iv. 15. *Straightway cometh Satan and taketh away the word which was sown in their hearts.*

Satan, the devil, the evil one that enters into men's hearts in these instances, can mean nothing but those evil passions and worldly desires, which extinguish the love of God, of truth and virtue in the hearts of men.

John xiii. 2. *The devil having now put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him.*

27. *And after the sop, then Satan entered into him.*

Luke xxii. 3. *Then Satan entered into Judas Iscariot.*

Pride, malice, disappointment in those worldly views which had led Judas at first to become one of Christ's disciples, and mortification and revenge at finding the wickedness of his heart discovered, these were the Satan, the devil that entered into and rankled in the breast of this most unhappy man, and excited him to betray his best benefactor and friend, who anxiously sought to make him good, into the hands of his enemies. For this black ingratitude he very soon openly condemned himself with bitterest remorse, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." Matth. xxvii. 4. In this declaration he furnishes a standing, perpetual testimony to the unspotted excellency of our Lord's private character, to the reality of the miracles ascribed to him, and to the truth of his religion, hardly to be resisted, which must please and affect every rational enquirer and lover of truth.

All the other instances in which our Lord uses the term Satan, &c. admit of an easy explanation.

John viii. 44. *The devil is your father, and ye willingly perform the lusts of your father. He was a man-slayer from the first, and continued not in the truth, because there is no truth in him.*

*A slayer of men*] in being the cause of the death of the first progenitors of the human race. An allusion to the common opinion of the fall, Gen. iii. 5.

Luke

Luke xiii. 16. *And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound, lo ! these eighteen years, to be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day ?*

In the popular language of the Jews, diseases and infirmities were attributed to Satan. See also Acts x. 38.

Luke xxii. 31. *And the Lord said : Simon, Simon, behold ! Satan hath obtained leave to sift you all like wheat.*

Our Lord warns his disciples of a great and dangerous trial being near ; an allusion to the history of Job, i. 9—12.

Math. xxv. 41—46. *Then will he also say to them on his left hand : Away from me, ye cursed ! into that everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.*

Here is a reference to some fabulous story, and most probably of heathen origin ; for there is no mention in the scriptures of any such beings, as a devil and his angels, except in this single passage, for which had there been any just foundation, it would not have been named in this passage only, and in such an incidental way.

We find the prince of the powers of the air alluded to in Ephes. ii. 1. *According to the Prince of the powers of the air*, which Archbishop Newcome translates, *according to the powerful ruler of the air* ; and then adds ; St. Paul adopts this description as well known to Jews and Gentiles, without asserting its truth ;

truth; as much as to say, according to the head of evil spirits, whom you Ephesians speak of under this character. This points to the doctrine of evil spirits being a heathen doctrine, as we know from other sources, to which our Lord might allude in the passage before us.

It has also been ably shewn by a French writer, in Bekker of Amsterdam's works, that the translation of *Jude*, ver. 6, should be, not the *angels*, but the *messengers*, who kept not their first estate, &c.

And also the parallel passage, *2 Pet. ii. 4.* should be, not if God spared not the *angels*, but the *messengers* which sinned, cast them down to hell, &c. And the same writer has clearly proved, that there is no reference here to fallen angels, but to the history of the persons sent out by Moses to spy out and make report of the land of Canaan; and to their false and wicked account, so as to discourage their countrymen from obeying the divine command.

The apostles of Christ, like their great Master, seem not to have understood that there was any devil, or evil being without them, whom men need to be afraid of, but only evil passions and worldly desires, and the wickedness into which these lead them.

*Acts v. 3. Then said Peter : Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart to deceive the holy spirit ?*

Here Satan was the vile, fraudulent and avaricious desires that possessed him.

*Acts xiii. 10. O full of all guile, and of all craftiness !*

*ness! Son of the devil! enemy of all righteousness;* i. e. resembling such a supposed being, not instigated by him.

Romans xvi. 20.—*and the God of peace will quickly trample Satan under your feet:* i. e. bad men, his instruments,] according to Dr. Whitby, the persecuting Jews.

1 Cor. v. 5.—*to deliver such an one to Satan.*

See *Luke* xiii. 16. 2 *Cor.* xii. 7. 1 *Tim.* i. 20. An allusion perhaps to Job being put into Satan's power to inflict suffering upon him to a certain degree. Some bodily disease was to be inflicted, to bring the offender to repentance. This mode of punishment, however, was confined to the age of miracles. See Archbishop Newcome upon the place.

2 *Cor.* xi. 14. *And no wonder; for Satan himself putteth on the appearance of an angel of light.* Perhaps St. Paul had in view *Job* i. 6.

*Eph.* iv. 27.—*neither give place to the devil,* or, as it is in Mr. Wakefield's translation, nor give any room to the accuser.

vi. 11.—*stand against the wiles of the devil,* or, against the devices of the accuser.

1 *Thess.* xi. 18. *Satan hindered us:* i. e. wicked men, instruments of evil.

2 *Thess.* xi. 9.—*according to the working of Satan;*—the operations of evil, with fraud and delusion and false miracles.

1 *Tim.*



† Tim. iii. 6, 7. 1

‡ Tim. ii. 26.

In these two passages, *the snare of the devil* should be rendered *the snare of the accuser*.

1 Tim. v. 15.—*for some have already turned aside after Satan*] that is, some women have behaved ill.

1 Peter v. 8. *Your adversary the devil walketh about seeking whom he may devour;*] that is, spies and informers who accused them before the heathen magistrates.

1 John ii. 13. *Ye have overcome the wicked one,* by the power of christian principles.

Archbishop Newcome\* and Mr. Wakefield, the two

\* It is highly to the credit of Archbishop Newcome, that he leaves out of his translation of the New Testament, the spurious text, 1 John v. 7. of the three heavenly witnesses, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, without any reserves or intimations, as if the doctrine generally held to be contained in that text was supported by other passages of Scripture; and that, at the same time, he gives such a clear and intelligible explanation of the whole passage, as shews that he himself made no such conclusions from it.

It is not to be doubted, that if it had pleased the divine providence to spare Mr. Wakefield's most valuable life, he would have availed himself of the Archbishop's version in his own projected new edition, as the Archbishop had profited by his improvements. Indeed the pious and useful labours of this excellent prelate in illustrating the sacred volume, deserve particular attention. And it is a great advantage in the present age, that from the versions now given of the scriptures by persons of great eminence in learning, every English reader may attain to a competent and satisfactory

two last translators of the New Testament, in their just and rational interpretations of the sacred volume, have not found it necessary to bring in a supposed great evil spirit, or being, to solve the accounts that are given of the devil, or Satan, which it contains, as the whole is more easily and naturally explained by considering these terms not as descriptive of any person or thing without us, but as referring to those wicked passions and tempers within us, whence all evil proceeds. And these being sufficient to account for the whole, it is wrong to seek or require any other cause.

So that the devil or Satan is not any person or thing without us, but selfish, jealous, envious, malignant, cruel, impure, fraudulent, ambitious desires and tempers indulged in us, and which tempted our first parents to sin and disobey the divine commands, and have unhappily induced their posterity in all ages to follow the same evil courses.

As to the interference of any evil being or spirit of a nature and powers superior to mankind, we do not scruple to assert, from the declarations in our sacred books, that there are no such evil beings or spirits who have any concern with human affairs. All such beings, who are recorded at any time to have had in-

factory knowledge of divine truth. It may be recommended to all families, who use the vulgar translation made under the auspices of James the First, to correct the prejudices which they have been led into from its various perversions of the text, by comparing together this translation with some other of our more valuable modern versions.

fluence

fluence over mankind, have been of heathen device and invention, as has before been pointed out : such, for instance, as St. Paul speaks of in his epistle to the Christians of Ephesus, by the phrase *the prince of the powers of the air*, one of their objects of worship.

In all times, the more ignorant mankind have been of the one great author of nature, and of his works, and of those holy writings which make farther revelation of him, the more have they been found to be addicted to such blind and baneful superstition.

The sum of what has been said, is to vindicate the Scriptures from the imputation of teaching the existence of a wicked spirit, called the devil or Satan, by shewing there is no such being, but that the evil which is in the world is produced from men's evil passions and dispositions, which are therefore called his works.

There is, therefore, no evil in the world but what takes its rise from men themselves :

Nor any devils, but so far as men extremely wicked and abandoned may deserve the name.

And to uphold such evil beings is to engraft heathenism upon christianity\*.

To

\* The Rev. Thomas Belsham, my honoured and much esteemed friend, has in an able general way, in his Review of Mr. Wilberforce's Treatise, p. 34, shewn the falsity of the opinion vulgarly entertained on evil spirits, and, in his convincing manner, proved it to be contrary to the principles of philosophy and the uniform tenor of the scripture. The whole work is admirably calculated to remove various other errors.

The world is also indebted to the same author for a late publication

To these conclusions the whole company gave their hearty concurrence, and, after some conversation, repeated their thanks to Synesius for the clearness with which he had summed up this supposed intricate question.

These repeated friendly conferences here ended, and the party then separated to return to their respective homes and duties, more fully impressed with their obligation as Christians, to study the word and works of God, to add practice to knowledge, and to communicate to others that light and truth which lead to eternal life.

cation entitled "Elements of the Philosophy of the Mind," where candour to his opponents, and a clear exposition of his own system, evince his superior talents, and the deep piety of his own mind; both of which, with a most exact critical knowledge of the scriptures, qualify him as a most eminent public teacher.

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